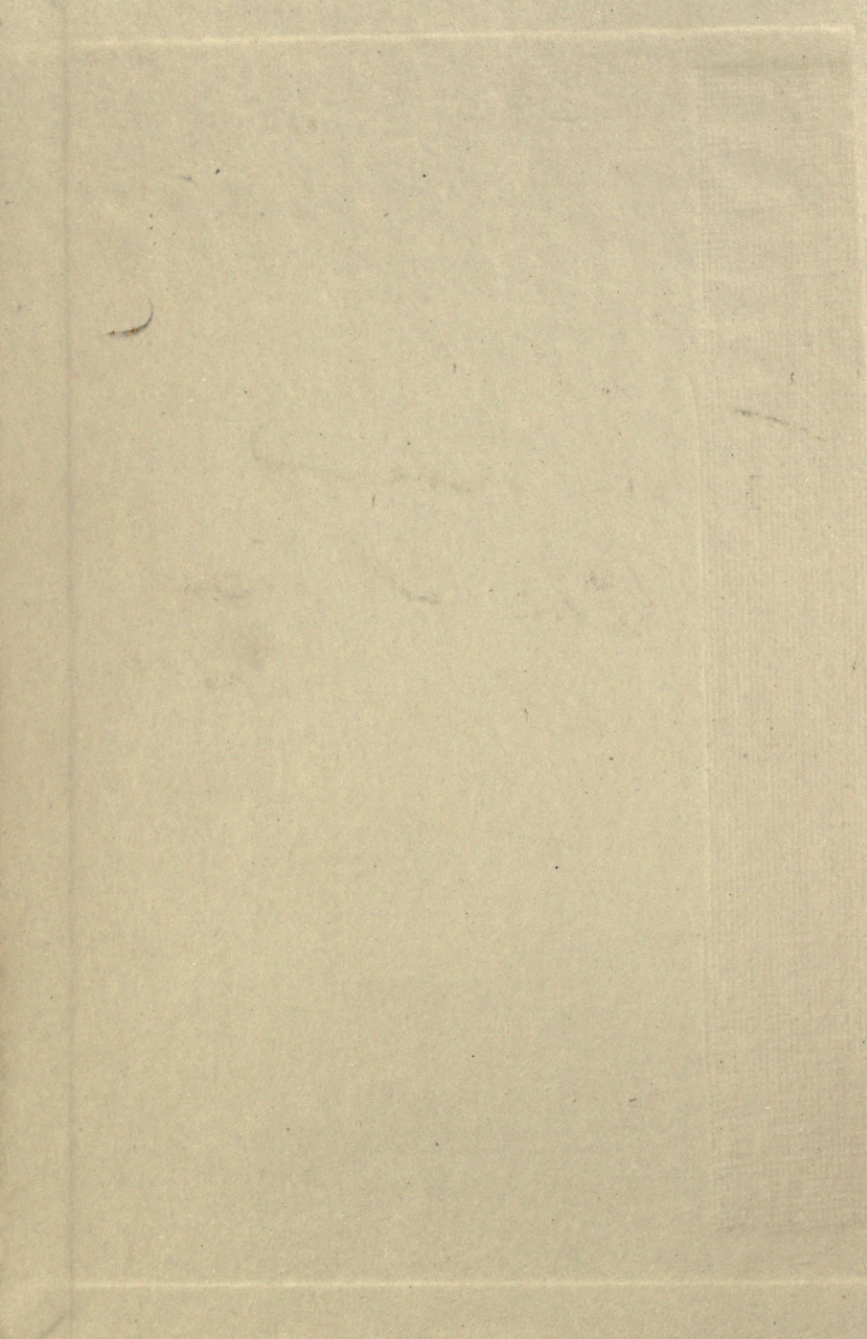


THE CONSPIRACY

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ROBERT BAKER
AND
JOHN EMERSON



To my friend.

Mrs. C. P. Gray,

With all good wishes.

John Emerson



THE CONSPIRACY



White
© 1912
CHARLES FERNAN

"ALL THE WORLD IS INTERESTED IN A CROOK."

THE CONSPIRACY

BY
ROBERT BAKER
AND
JOHN EMERSON

ILLUSTRATED



NEW YORK
DUFFIELD & COMPANY
1913

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THE CONSPIRACY

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CHAPTER I

A QUEER FISH

THERE are some queer fish in New York, queer human fish that swim and wriggle in the great pool of life that spreads from shore to shore of Manhattan. They come seldom to the surface, and when they do it is only to blink and dive beneath again to seek their own familiar haunts. They are a school by themselves, these queer fish; book-worms, savants, inventors, philosophers, so buried in their own thoughts and pursuits that they neither know nor see how time and progress gradually change them, at least in outward appearance, into veritable specimens for museums.

In a red brick house in a certain part of old Greenwich village, where the dwellings

have not yet grown higher than two or three stories, and the streets are not yet cañoned and made straight by the rage for skyscrapers, and the sun still gets through a lower window now and then, lived one of these queer beings, Winthrop Clavering, the author. Such classics as "The Unseen Hand," "The Second Floor Front," "The Murder of Father Dominick" and scores of other thrillers had made his name familiar to the public, though he kept himself unseen. Living like a hermit, his few wants attended to by an old negress Martha, he wrote his blood-curdling stories and took his vicarious part in the passions and emotional crimes of the metropolis. One after the other his tales had appeared, at first in paper form, and then as the taste of the newspaper public needed more and more the stimulation of sensationalism, finding place in the pages of the great dailies; with such success too that now each new instalment of a serial by Winthrop Clavering was taken with keener appetite and relish all the time.



MARGARET HOLT.

“All the world loves a lover,” and it was Winthrop Clavering’s observation that “all the world is interested in a crook.” It was the instinct of self-preservation coming out in people, he told himself; the instinct in most people that made them want to see another man, even a wrong-doing one, save his life and neck and get away as if he were themselves. He wove his stories about the crimes and misdemeanours of the genus crook, and there was always a new kind of crook to write about too. He never racked his brain to invent an original plot or story; he found it in some crime that had been committed close at hand, in New York, generally one that as yet remained shrouded in mystery, though all the circumstances were in the news. In such a selection he was sure of a popular theme; something that every one was talking about; for, as he told the editor of the *Telescope*, “I always try to get my stories up in such a way that people won’t have to do much thinking. Most of them can’t think anyway.”

In the course of time his criminology became a passion with him. He ate and slept with his ideas. The walls of his shabby study were covered with X-ray photographs of the hands and finger prints of criminals. On his book-shelves stood a jar containing the brain of a notorious law-breaker,—his faithful Martha called it “pickled brains”—which he had got possession of by great ingenuity and persistence. It was the brain of a man who had murdered his grandmother, he always told people, and he considered it a most invaluable relic “in his line.”

No sooner did Winthrop Clavering hear of a murder than he hastened hot foot to the scene of the crime to go over every detail of the affair, and poke his nose into every corner and crevice like a hound, sniffing about for a fresh scent, his little fox-like eyes snapping like electric sparks, as he found even the minutest thread of a clue. The reporters and the police came to regard him as firemen do the fanatics and enthusiasts who

run with the engines to the scene of every fire, even while they chaffed and sometimes hurt him by laughing at his comicality. He had the resilience of youth, though he was not young, never tiring, never sleeping, his brain working nervously with the rapidity of a Maxim gun. He considered permission from Police Headquarters to make his investigations unnecessary, he just pushed in. He was looked upon as a joke by some of the blue-coats and by others tolerated as one who always handed them a laugh; but he went on his way unheeding jeers or cheers. When he had satisfied himself as to his observations on a case, he would return to his musty quarters, change his old cape-coat for a shiny velvet jacket, don a black skull-cap, light his pipe, and pace the room for several miles at least before his narrative began to flow. Very carefully he would make his deductions. At first his practice had been to write out all his stories in long hand, but as his manuscripts became more and more illegible he had been compelled to employ a

stenographer to take his dictation from him. He generally wore each new one out by the end of the first week, what with his long hours of work and his peevishness. "Good Lord," he would say. "Are you posing as the sleeping beauty? A man only requires five hours' sleep and an ordinary woman six. Only an owl needs eight."

It was through one of his own stories that Clavering became convinced of his especial value to the community in the pursuit and detection of criminals. He had written a story built on the murder of the Catholic priest, Father Dominick, who had been found lying in a pool of blood at the foot of the altar at St. Bridget's Church, in West 9— Street, in 1893. All efforts of the police to solve the mystery had proved futile, but Clavering as usual went over all the ground, made his observations quietly and then published a story, founded on this crime, in which he worked out the true solution of the gruesome mystery. It was his happiest achievement so far, and he was al-

ways proud of it and of its consequences. One day seated in a subway car, he noticed a man in front of him reading in the newspaper the last instalment of this story, the one which described, with much particularity, the murder of the poor priest, and as he watched the man reading he noticed a great trembling of his hands and a ghastly pallor on his face, and heard finally the muttered exclamation: "My God, how did he know?" When the man hurriedly left the car at Forty-second Street Clavering was close on his heels. It was the work of a few moments to signal an officer and have the man arrested on suspicion. His agitation was so apparent that he was taken at once to headquarters, where he confessed in due form. His admission that the main facts of the crime were almost identical with those described in Clavering's story was a great feather in the novelist's cap. Clavering himself attached great importance to the thing, indeed expected to be officially attached to the secret service bureau as one

result of it then and there; he saw himself acclaimed the foremost living authority on crime and no criminal safe within his jurisdiction. To his bitter disappointment there was no recognition of his work at all from headquarters; the blue-coats continued to laugh and call him "Little Nemo," as if the detection of Father Dominick's assassin had been the merest accident or coincidence.

Then again there was the case of that Greek boy, William Saphiro, who was abducted. Clavering with his usual zeal, undaunted by continued lack of appreciation from those high in authority, formed his own theories on this case, too, and going to Captain Ryan, in whose precinct the abduction had taken place, offered to show him how he could run down the abductor.

Ryan only laughed and said: "The police department don't need any wise guys like you to teach 'em their trade. Say, get this: You keep your nose out of our business! Back to the Nick Carter stuff, for yours."

Clavering, choking with rage and emphasising each word with a pound of his cane on Ryan's desk retorted: "If you'd put a set of my books in headquarters and make your blue-coats read them, you all might learn something about the detection of crime."

And indeed it was not long before his anger turned to gloating, for when the boy Saphiro was found, his abductor, who had escaped to Europe, far beyond the reach of extradition, was none other than Clavering had predicted in his fiction.

And so in various ways it came about that the story teller, less and less appreciated by the police, turned for recognition to the public that reads the newspapers. For weeks at a time now Clavering was not seen by the blue-coats. The enormous output, the incredible productiveness of his brain nevertheless was gaining vogue in the *Evening Telescope*, which had contracted with him generously for three new serials.

The next thing to attract his intellect was

the machinations of the Scarlet Band, as the fame and depredations of this, New York's latest vicious organisation, spread abroad. He formed his theory as to a possible capture of the leaders, but to what end, he asked himself. The police would not listen to him; they would only laugh at him: at *him*, whom they refused to recognise as the world's foremost authority on crime. He had half a mind to make one more attempt, one last effort to be heard. He would not go to headquarters this time, he would reach higher up. An interview with Victor Holt, Assistant District Attorney, the one man in New York who appeared to be taking a live interest in the detection and extermination of the Scarlet Band, might bear fruit. In his shabby cape and slouch hat, with a parting injunction to Martha, not, under penalty of death, to disturb any of his papers, he left the house and bent his steps in the direction of the Assistant District Attorney's office, mumbling so audibly to himself the while, that passers-by turned to look and smile at the strange

figure, with its squeaky boots and stumping cane.

Clavering had seen pictures of Victor Holt in the papers and liked his looks. "Fools! I'll show them," he muttered. "I'll show them a thing or two in the way of detecting crime. I'll show them."

He had mounted the steps of the L road at Clinton Place and settled back in his seat, full of the Scarlet Band, when his eyes lighted suddenly on the glaring headlines of a newspaper held outspread by some one opposite to him.

"MURDER AT THE HOTEL BEAUMONT! JAMES MORTON, CUTLERY MERCHANT, STABBED IN HIS ROOM!" they shrieked in print.

The words were like a challenge to Winthrop Clavering, the great amateur in the detection of crime—a new scent, involving temporary loss of the old one but none the less challenging to his mettle. He alighted at the next platform and purchased an extra for himself, running rapidly through all

the particulars, engrossed almost by anticipation in the murder of this James Morton of whom he had never heard before. He would not go to Victor Holt's that day, he would stop at the old Beaumont and see what he could see.

And so it happened that although he did not see Victor Holt that day he laid the beginning of a new romance that was not without interest to Victor Holt or those near to him; a romance, indeed, considered by many of his appreciative readers to be the most thrilling he had yet penned on paper. But for one thing he must get a new stenographer, he told himself. He would call up Miss Towne at The Refuge in Rivington Street and see what new applicants she might have on her list.

CHAPTER II

THE AFFAIR AT THE ROSSAMANO

JACK HOWELL, reporter, of the *New York Evening Telescope*, better known to his associates as "Nosey Jack," a sobriquet he had won from his abnormal scent for news and scoops, gave a scornful glance at the assignment book putting him down for a "Sunday special" on the Settlement Houses of the "East-side."

"Well, wouldn't that make you send flowers to your own grave!" he commented, thumping the head of Andy Rivers, who occupied the desk in front of his, with a generous roll of copy paper.

"What's the matter, Jack?" inquired the recipient of this special delivery.

"Oh, stung for another special. Third I've had in a month. Last time they handed

me out that freak, Winthrop Clavering, to do a write-up on."

"Say, he's a nut, isn't he?" said Andy.

"Oh, no! The World's foremost Authority on Crime! He and Stealthy Steve. Queer old fish! Nearly threw me out of his house. I thought before I got away he'd have my finger prints taken. He's got some ideas, though, growing on his bean-vine, don't you forget it. And don't overlook the fact either that those spine-vibrating, crime-serials of his, have a lot of readers."

"Pretty raw, that Scarlet Band story he's writing now," said Andy, shaking his head. "The Blood on the Door Handle! Good Nick Carter stuff."

"Well, believe me, Andy, that Scarlet Band does exist," said Jack; "and it's a pretty raw bunch, too. I got Clavering to talking about them. He says if he had the blue-coats under his direction he'd have the hobble on those 'Red Banders' in no time at all; and I'm not sure he may not know what he's talking about."

"They've been trying to throw a scare in to Victor Holt, all right, haven't they?" suggested Rivers.

"Yes," replied Howell. "He got one of their 'pink notes,' telling him he must behave, or they would 'hand him one.' Billy Flynn, one of the Byrnes men who is working for the Assistant District Attorney, showed me the letter the gang sent to Holt's office. Pretty raw, it was."

"Is Holt scared?"

"Not he! He's no piker! But Flynn's got a tip that there's a regular conspiracy on foot to put the obnoxious A. D. A. far from the madding crowd. If they do that—well, I tell you, Andy, they'll pull down this whole blooming town about their ears. Every right-minded citizen, every stranger within its gates is mad over Holt. The man's so incorruptibly honest, so determined to pursue this gang and smash 'em, that he inspires even the timid, and the Lord knows there are enough of that stripe in this gay metropolis. Well, I can't hang around here

and gossip with you. I'm off on the Settlement Expedition. Wish the old man had put some one else on it. So long! Me for the 'down and out club.' ”

There was a touch of winter in the air as Howell lit a cigarette, and, with some further grumblings at his assignment, left the office to begin his search for his material. He figured that the frequenters of the Settlements would seek the shelter and warmth of the Settlement Houses sooner than usual after dark, now it was cold, therefore he had time to fortify himself, before beginning his uncongenial task, by dining at the Café Rossamano in the Italian quarter, where the spaghetti was excellent and the gorgonzola and Chianti the best New York afforded at the price.

It is a strange weaver of fates sometimes that makes two human orbits intersect each other and flash their lights across from sphere to sphere; a weaver of fates as strange as any *deus ex machina* in a tale by Winthrop Clavering himself. As Jack Howell

approached the Rossamano from one direction there came from another, at top speed, a taxi bearing a young woman. The car swayed around a corner and stopped beneath the electric sign, Café Rossamano, and Jack could see through the open window, first that the young woman was pretty, second that she was trembling like a leaf. She was out of the cab almost before it stopped, looking through the lighted windows of the restaurant, and her eyes caught those evidently of a man putting on his coat. "Thank God he is safe!" she murmured fervently, and Jack could hear her. Not daring to enter the place, apparently, she waited in the shadow of the doorway for some one to come out. With her eager gaze fixed on the entrance, she did not see three men who emerged from a third taxi across the street and swiftly and quietly approached the Café.

Presently, the young man, he whom the girl was evidently seeking, though Jack could not descry his face, came through the

entrance way. She started towards him, impulsively, and called "Victor!" when suddenly a pair of rough hands seized her from behind and at the same moment the man Victor, so eagerly coming toward her, was grabbed and overpowered by two of the trio of ruffians deposited by the taxi-cab. The whole thing was as swift and instantaneous as a motion picture film, and for one moment Jack Howell felt like a mere spectator in the whole business. The next his sympathies surged warmly up and he was an actor in the drama without ado. The girl was pretty and in distress. Jack was young and ruddy-blooded, and in spite of his boyishness and his air of slang and devil-may-care by nature essentially chivalrous. In another instant he was in the midst of the affray. He had been a witness to the assault, had seen the look of appeal in the girl's eyes, and he proposed to answer it to some effect. In a second he dealt a stiff upper-cut on the jaw of the ruffian who held her by the throat. It was a hard blow and well directed, and he

felt his knuckles crunch most satisfactorily as they went home, felling the thug to the ground. After all, Jack Howell loved a fight.

The girl, freed from the grasp of her assailant, tried to reach the man she had come for, but a violent push from one of the men with whom he was struggling, sent her reeling against the building, half stunned. The man himself was dragged across the street and thrust into a cab, the driver of which hastened to help the half unconscious victim of Howell's blow to join his fellows in it. As the cab moved off the girl gave a despairing cry and started in pursuit, only to see it speed away and soon disappear.

Breathless and exhausted, she was on the verge of a collapse; what should she do—oh, what could she do now? . . . The words of despair were written all too plainly on her lovely but now clouded features.

The cry of a newsboy brought her to her senses with a shock, and made her body grow rigid as his hoarse words reached her ears:

"Extry! Extry! All about the murder at the Hotel Beaumont." . . .

As for Jack Howell, when he regained consciousness enough to open his eyes and look about him, he was lying on the window seat at the Café Rossamano, with the proprietor bending anxiously over him. There were a few moments of dazed wondering as to how he came to be there; then the mists cleared and a twinge from his badly bruised and swollen hand served as the missing link between the present and his past adventure on the sidewalk in front of the Café.

He roused himself with a start.

"Who hit me? Jack Johnson?" he muttered confusedly; then as his mind steadied again he wondered: "Where's the girl?" Her eyes had seemed to burn into his so reproachfully. With a mighty effort he got to his feet. "Where is she? I must help her," he cried excitedly.

Slowly the events that had followed his arrival in front of the Café began to fall into

line. What had he stumbled into, he wondered. That was more than a mere hold-up that he had taken a hand in. Who was the man Victor? Ouch! Because of that infernal thug he had lost the chance of a scoop too for his paper!

He made inquiries of the proprietor, but the man merely shrugged his shoulders and—knew nothing. He had heard a cry, he said, and upon going out had found Signor Howell lying on the side-walk. That was all!

“Was it all? Not if you’re a damned liar!” thought Jack; “but I don’t know as it’s the time now to tell you what I think of you.”

Well, he had undoubtedly lost a good thing, but he must go on with his regular work just the same. He lingered over a cup of strong coffee after dinner and consulted the list of Settlement Houses in his book. “The Refuge!” That sounded the most promising. It suggested atmosphere. He would do “The Refuge” first.

As he left the Café two newspaper cronies hailed him, but he passed them with unseeing eyes. "What in thunder can have happened to old Jack?" one of them exclaimed. "He looked dazed." They turned to look after the rapidly disappearing figure. "No, it can't be that," they thought, "he's walking as straight as a parson. He's probably struck a scoop."

Howell made his way along the brilliantly lighted streets, through the hurrying, jostling crowds, his mind reverting always to the pretty and sweet-looking girl whom he had helped. "What wonderful eyes she had!" he thought. "And what a glance of gratitude she threw me." What was she after, he speculated. Who was the Victor she was so eager to get in touch with? What had upset her so, and made her seem so stricken and afraid? He would give a good deal to know if he was ever to see that girl again, Jack Howell would. She was . . .

"Extry! Extry! All about the murder at the Beaumont!"

The cry brought him back with a shock from his reveries. A paper was thrust in front of him. Mechanically he took it and glanced at the head-lines, then thrust the thing into his pocket in disgust: "And I wasn't at the Beaumont, either," he sighed dolefully. "I bet Jimmy Gallagher got that scoop. Oh pshaw! I'll go down to that Refuge and start a murder special of my own . . ."

CHAPTER III

AT THE REFUGE

“YIP-I-ADDY-I-AY-AY!”

The sound came forth in a wail from the phonograph provided for the amusement of the guests and waifs at The Refuge in Livingston Street. In the consciously quiet room, with its intentionally “refined” surroundings, the scratchy, dolorous whine contrasted quaintly with the exulting lewdness of the selection on the “record.”

Professor Kaufman, sitting at the reading table over in the alcove, farthest from the street, raised his head and frowned savagely at “the poor man’s opera.” The professor was a poor man himself; he was making a few quarters by long, hard work over a Spanish translation, and the phonograph annoyed him.

Miss Towne, the secretary of The Refuge,

was busy at her card catalogue, and the frown was wasted on her shapely back. Old Sam Shipman, the author of the assault on the professor's peace, was studying a crucial move in a game of checkers with Col. Schultz at a little table in front of the open fire, while the Colonel dozed blissfully, the white bowl of his china pipe resting cosily among the folds of his old blue army shirt, which, though minus a button or two, strove with the spirit of '61 to hem in and confine an ample waist.

Observing that nothing could be accomplished by frowning, the Professor rose, violently kicked his chair back and stamped over to the phonograph, which presently subsided with a plaintive bleat in the middle of a bar. The Professor stamped back to his chair. Mr. Shipman raised his head from his scrutiny of a strategic pathway into king row, glared at the retiring Professor—and switched on the music again. He had hardly settled himself to study his move when the Professor again strangled the con-

cert and retired. Mr. Shipman, his grey moustache bristling with belligerency, rose to hold up his end of the controversy when Miss Towne's quiet voice pushed him back into his seat.

"Mr. Shipman, I would not start that again if I were you," she said sweetly.

"All right—if you say so," growled the music lover, with a final glare at the Professor, meant to convey the information that he bowed only to recognised authority. But the Professor's red nose was down within an inch of his work, and Mr. Shipman found an outlet for his feelings by prodding his opponent in the ribs with an unnecessary vehemence.

"Vot is it?" gasped the German, thus unceremoniously yanked out of Dreamland.

"It's your move," growled Mr. Shipman.

"Huh?" blinked the Colonel.

"I say it's your move."

"Ah!" Colonel Schultz took a long pull at his pipe, surveyed his opponent's latest attack and moved accordingly, humming

blithely as he saw Mr. Shipman marching open-eyed into a trap.

The Professor's head jerked back and he frowned at the checker table again. Colonel Schultz hummed on, and, after hissing "Silence" without effect, the Professor got another ruling on humming from Miss Towne.

Thereafter there was peace for a brief while and the young lady had leisure to answer the telephone.

The room was a large one typical of an East Side settlement. At one side there was a large window opening on the street, and at the left of that a door that opened into a hall which in turn led also to the street. . . . In the back was an alcove with a window. Pictures of Lincoln, Washington, Mona Lisa and the Roman forum adorned the walls. There were bookcases and tables and altogether an attempt at home, which somehow missed the sure comfort and safety of home and became in aspect as well as name a "refuge" more than a real home. Miss Towne sat good-naturedly through it

all, while the old fellows chaffed and chafed and bickered, or asked questions.

"Is the *Evening Telescope* there, Miss Towne?" demanded Col. Shipman. "I want to get to-day's instalment of Winthrop Clavering's last thriller. It's called 'The Blood on the Door Handle.' Are you reading it?"

"I? Oh dear no!" said Miss Towne, passing him the paper.

"Well, you ought to. It's the best yet. It's founded on the disappearance of that Reynolds girl about two months ago."

"Millicent Reynolds?" asked Miss Towne, interested.

"She has never been heard from, has she?"

"No!" said Shipman, "but I've an idea if they'd follow up old Clavering's tip here they might find her. He thinks it was the work of the Scarlet Band."

"The Scarlet Band!" queried Miss Towne. "I thought the Scarlet Band was a gang of forgers!"

"Oh, everything's grist to their mill,

but their chief stunt is this White Slave stuff."

"Good heavens!" cried Miss Towne. "Are they too mixed up in the White Slave Traffic? I thought . . ."

"T-r-r-r-r!" went the telephone bell, and Miss Towne patiently took down the receiver.

"Mr. Winthrop Clavering?" she repeated. And Mr. Shipman turned to listen.

"He's trying to secure a stenographer through our employment bureau. He'll be here later," volunteered Miss Towne.

"Coming here!" cried the Colonel. "Well, I'd like to meet him. He's an authority on crime. Why, I've heard he's run down more crooks than all the New York police put together."

"That's not saying much!" put in Kaufman.

Shipman disregarded this quip, his head deep in the paper.

"Ha! Ha! No Scarlet Band, eh? . . . Kaufman!" he cried. "Listen to this!"

Triumphantly he began to read aloud: " 'Conspiracy to kill Victor Holt. Assistant District Attorney receives threatening letter from the Scarlet Band. It has just been learned that Victor Holt, the Assistant District Attorney, who has been the moving spirit in the crusade against the notorious Scarlet Band, recently received a letter from the Society, threatening him with death unless he immediately ceased his operations against the organisation.' Nonsense, is it? Well, all the same I'd rather be right here in our little Refuge, than in Victor Holt's shoes if that bunch are after him."

But Kaufman scoffed, and the argument between the two, one for, one against the existence of the Scarlet Band, might have waxed even beyond the resourceful control of Miss Towne, had it not been for the abrupt entrance of an unexpected visitor—a pretty girl, wearing a blue coat and having a big red flower in her hat.

Miss Towne rose patiently to receive her.

CHAPTER IV

THE BLUE DRESS AND THE RED HAT

As the great door swung to behind her the girl took one step forward and paused, looking about. This was The Refuge! To such as she the room in which she stood was large and homelike. A Franklin grate shed the glowing light from its bed of red-gold coals upon a great white cat who lay dozing on the rug in front of it and now blinked its green, wily eyes at the girl in a knowing way. On either side of the long curtained windows in the alcove were shelves of green and flowering plants.

The whole room and its occupants, in a curious way, focussed upon the girl in the blue dress and the red hat standing appealing and irresolute in the door.

As she moved forward, Miss Towne looked up from her writing, and noted the girl's lagging step and white, strained face.

"I am the secretary here," she said kindly. "Can I help you?"

The warmth of the tone made the girl's overtaxed strength seem almost to give way; walls, tables, chairs, seemed to be joining in a mad whirl about her. She clutched at the desk for support, and said with an attempt at an apologetic smile: "I'm tired. I have been walking a long distance."

"You're faint! Sit down!" the older woman urged, and added half aloud: "Poor child! Looking for work, I suppose."

"I understand that you have rooms. Lodgings for women," said the girl faintly.

"We have. But they are all occupied just now. I'm sorry."

The girl's lips quivered with disappointment. "Couldn't you find some place for me?" she pleaded. "I am too tired to look further."

"Have you no relatives or friends in the city?" queried Miss Towne, solicitously. Her clear, questioning eyes were as if sounding the very depths of the soul, but the girl answered haltingly and hesitatingly: "No. I have just come from Chicago. I thought that I might be able to get work in New York."

"You arrived in the city only to-day?" asked Miss Towne.

"Er—Yes." Again the girl stammered.

Miss Towne looked towards the door through which her visitor had entered. "Haven't you any luggage?" she asked.

"Oh, I checked my bag at the station," said the girl.

"Why did you not go to a hotel?" asked the secretary again.

"Why? Oh, I've been told that the hotels will not take women who are alone, at night."

"Yes, but you could—"

"Oh, but can't I stay here just for this one night?" The girl tried very hard to

appeal to the other's sympathy and put an end to questioning. She gave a quivering sigh of relief as she saw Miss Towne take her pen and prepare to write on an index card before her. "Did you have employment in Chicago?" the secretary asked gently.

"Yes."

"Of what nature?"

"I was a stenographer." The answers came more glibly now.

"Why did you leave Chicago?" pursued Miss Towne.

"I—wanted to come to New York."

The secretary dipped her pen into the ink again. "What is your name?"

"My name? My name is Ruth Farley," the girl said and gave a sigh of relief as she saw the two words inscribed on a card and put in place in the index file.

"Ruth Farley," repeated Miss Towne presently. "And you say that you have been employed as a stenographer?"

"Yes."

"I may be able to find a position for you," said the secretary encouragingly as she handed the pen. "Sign your name here, please."

The girl grasped the pen, desperately trying to control the trembling of her fingers. She gave a little shaky laugh as she saw the woman watching her.

"I am so tired that I can hardly make the letters," she apologised. "There," she added, as "Ruth Farley" stared back from the card. "I think that you will be able to read it." Then with pathetic appeal: "Are you sure that you won't be able to give me a room?"

"I am afraid not. But—"

Again there came an interruption in the ringing of the telephone on her desk.

"Hello! Yes, this is The Refuge. Who is this? Oh, Police Headquarters. What? Yes, we have an employment bureau. Yes. What is the name? Mary Hadfield?"

The strange girl's cheeks were white, her eyes aflame, her whole frame tense; she

started to rise, but as she moved she caught the eyes of the man who had been reading the newspaper fixed upon her. It was only because the words "Police Headquarters" habitually excited his interest, though she did not know that. She sank back again in her chair.

Miss Towne, who had been looking through her index cards, took up the receiver again. "No," she said. "We've no one on our books by that name. You're welcome. Good-bye."

She turned back to the new-comer. "How late may I stay here?" the girl inquired eagerly, as though wondering what she should do or which way she should turn, if she had to move on.

"Eleven o'clock is our hour for closing," said Miss Towne, touched by the hopelessness of the girl's face; and she added: "Don't worry. We'll try to find some place to put you in to-night. Have you had any dinner?"

"Dinner!" The idea seemed a mockery.

What time had she had to think of dinner?
"No," she replied weakly.

"Oh, that's what's the matter then," Miss Towne exclaimed cheerily. "Something to eat and a cup of tea will rest you up. Come with me." Tenderly she placed her arm across the girl's shoulders.

As they moved towards the door the discordant cry of a newsboy penetrated to the peaceful atmosphere of the room, unintelligible at first, but, as the sound came nearer, resolving itself into something like "Beaumont Hotel!"

The words attracted Miss Towne's attention as well as the girl's. She went to the window and rapped loudly. "Bring me a paper," she called. "Our house physician, Dr. Jennings, was called to the Beaumont late this afternoon," she explained as she made a hasty search in her purse for pennies. "I wonder if—"

She was interrupted by the noisy entrance of the boy.

"Here you are. Extra!" he shouted.

"Sh!" came from the table. "Be quiet!"

Miss Towne looked towards the indignant reader. "You must not expect silence always in this room, Professor Kaufman," she smiled.

The man muttered something in reply but elicited from the newsboy no more satisfactory answer than a rough "Aw, chop it! Chop it!"—emphasised further by a shrill blast on his fingers as he passed close to the Professor's chair.

Red head-lines flared on the paper in Miss Towne's hand. "MURDER AT THE HOTEL BEAUMONT," the secretary read aloud. "A woman suspected. James Morton—"

"Excuse me," interposed the girl, trembling. "Did you say that I should find the dining room this way?"

The words brought Miss Towne back to a realisation of her duties. "I beg your pardon, my dear, I am most thoughtless. I'll go with you at once."

She laid the paper down and led the way

to the dining room. Shipman, to whom murder extras were the elixir of life, seized the discarded sheet at once. "Wake up, Schultz!" he commanded. "There's been a murder!"

"A murder? Eh! Vat? Here?" questioned the Dutchman sleepily.

"No, no! At the Hotel Beaumont," Shipman explained, pointing to the headlines. "Listen to this, will you?" In great excitement he adjusted his glasses and read aloud—

MURDER AT THE BEAUMONT HOTEL!!

James Morton, a cutlery merchant, was killed by a knife thrust at about five-thirty this afternoon, in his rooms at the Hotel Beaumont. Shortly before the murder Morton had a caller, a woman. The elevator boy declares that she was a foreigner, Italian or Spanish. The boy did not see the woman leave. Morton had recently taken into his employ a stenographer named Mary Hadfield. Neither of the elevator boys remembers having taken her up or down to-day, though she may have used the stairs. When the hotel clerk reached Morton's room, he found the door locked

on the inside. The door was broken down, but no one was found in the room except the dead man. . . .

"H'm," ejaculated Shipman as he folded the paper and laid it on the table, "I bet Winthrop Clavering will make a great story out of *that*. Come on, Schultz, let's go round to the lecture and see what's doing. There's a lecture on Roosevelt's African hunt down at the Hall."

"Roosevelt!" called Schultz; "is he running again?"

"No, no; a lecture on Roosevelt's African hunt down at the Hall. Come on!"

The two men, arm and arm, went out of the room just as Jack Howell entered it. He looked back after he had passed them, quizzically. "Great Scott!" he ejaculated, "What types! And I've missed the chance of getting some 'copy' out of them too. My name seems to be General Misser to-day."

CHAPTER V

JACK HOWELL

THERE could have been no greater contrast than that between the two wrecked, useless lives that had just drifted out of The Refuge and the young reporter who entered it. Jack Howell's cheery, clean, whole-hearted personality made one think of great stretches of breezy country, of pluck and valiant deeds and achievement. Just now it is true the usually clear eyes held a slightly dazed look and pain was drawing tiny, fine lines about the corners of the firm mouth. However, he shook his broad shoulders and by way of announcing himself exclaimed in a tone audible from one side of the room to the other: "Good evening! Everybody!"

"Sh!" came from the irritable book-worm.

Jack looked to see whence this curious and hospitable greeting came.

"Did that steam escape from you?" he inquired, locating the Professor as the generator of the hiss.

"Quiet, I must have quiet," came the acid rejoinder.

"I beg your pardon. I didn't know that I must soft-pedal."

Making his voice as "gentle as any sucking dove" Jack repeated: "Good evening! Good evening, everybody." He repeated his greeting in a hoarse whisper, as Miss Towne entered and took her seat again at her desk. "Whom do you wish to see?" she asked, addressing Howell.

"I haven't wished yet," was his rather flippant reply, as he turned to take in his surroundings. "So they call this The Refuge, eh? It looks to me more like the Eden Musée," he commented, as his eyes lighted on the book-worm who sat like an effigy in the alcove. The steadfast and haughty expression on the face of the secretary made him realise that what to him seemed comedy to her no doubt meant deadly

earnest. He hastened to repair his error. "I beg your pardon," he said with a very winning smile. "My name is Howell." Producing a card to prove it he laid it on her desk: "Jack Howell of the *Evening Telescope*, commonly called 'Nosey Jack,' not for any racial reason, however. The old man sent me down here to do a write-up for the Sunday edition. I've had a lot of soft ones lately," he went on confidently. "Last week I had the Animal Hospital, and spent most of the day nursing sick cats. Week before—"

He was now getting into his best colloquial stride but judged by the passive face before him he was not making any particular impression on his gallery. Miss Towne, whose bump of humour was a deep cavity, acknowledged his effort to be entertaining by gathering up a handful of pamphlets from a table and depositing them on the desk before him. "Here is an outline covering our work," she remarked curtly, "if it is information you are seeking."

"Oh, I don't want that kind of junk," cried Jack. And a hasty inspection of the material placed at his disposal made him go on: "I want to get a flash at the human side of your outfit here. It's the heart stuff that gets the readers, you know. Funny, isn't it, how people like to read about other peoples' troubles to forget their own?"

"You'll find plenty of the 'heart-stuff,' as you call it, here," remarked Miss Towne dryly.

"I'd like to nose round for a while, if you don't mind," said Jack, "and get some of your Refugees to talking; but I don't suppose they'll loosen up much if they get me as a reporter. I'll frame it up so they think me down and out too. It will be true enough. I was, an hour ago," he added, reminded of his late adventure by the stabbing pain in his hand. "Isn't it about time for some of your people to be blowing in?"

The breeziness of the reporter began to make itself felt. "I'm afraid you have

struck on a bad night," replied Miss Towne, almost apologetically. "Most of our regulars have gone to the Travel Talk at The Peoples' Institute."

"Just my luck!" ejaculated Howell dolefully. "It's been a rotten day for me anyway. How about that old chap, there?" he asked, lowering his voice. "Do you suppose I could get anything out of him? He looks as if he'd had a past."

"He has. He used to be a professor in one of the universities, till drink got the best of him."

"He's a student of Bacchus now, eh?" chaffed Howell.

"He earns a little money now and then by making translations for writers like Robert Sears and Theodore Calner, or Winthrop Clavering."

"Oh, does he? For 'Little Nemo'? That's what they all call Clavering up at Police Headquarters, you know," explained Jack. "You know he's always telling the police how to conduct their business. Queer

old pelican he is! But he's got the real detective stuff in him. I found that out after talking with him five minutes, even if I do make fun of him."

"Do you know him well?" questioned Miss Towne, referring to a slip of paper on her desk.

"Oh, I run across him at the office, occasionally. You know my paper prints that 'I've-got-you-now stuff' of his."

"Because he has applied to us for a stenographer," explained the secretary, "and I judged from the conversation I had with him over the telephone that he must be a difficult person to suit."

"Well, I should hate to take that stuff down from dictation myself," said Jack. "Why, before I had worked for him a week I'm sure I should be committing one of those pleasant little murders he writes about. I should probably lose my job by murdering the old fellow himself. However, he is all right on the pay, I guess. But to return to the object of my visit; I suppose that nearly

everybody who blows in here hands you a hard luck story?"

"Oh, of course, and true ones, no doubt," replied Miss Towne. "You know this is a harbour for disappointed hopes, the last port for the derelict."

"Good!" ejaculated Howell, feeling in his pocket for his pencil. "I'm going to steal that."

"I don't understand," said Miss Towne blankly.

"Why! I'm going to use that thing you just pulled as the leader for my dope. 'Cruising Among the Derelicts.'"

Enthusiastically he commenced to write, but immediately dropped the pencil from his swollen fingers with a slight groan.

"H'm! That's going to be fine," he whistled, looking at his hand. "You're not looking for a job as amanuensis yourself by any chance," he inquired of the secretary.

"Oh, what an awful looking hand," cried Miss Towne, with quick sympathy. "How did you do it?"

"That? Oh, just a little rough-house down at the Café Rossamano before I came here. The usual dope. Beautiful maiden in distress. Sir Galahad to the rescue, and all that sort of thing. Nice little souvenir, isn't it?" he said, gazing at the injured member. "But she was worth it," he continued. "The very prettiest thing you ever saw. And eyes! You could look into those big grey eyes and get a moving picture of Paradise. I don't know who she was, but you can put this in your list of engagement announcements: she can scramble the eggs for my breakfast any morning she cares to, and put Mrs. John Howell on her visiting card to suit her convenience any day."

His impassioned flow of serio-comic eloquence was interrupted by an indignant "Sh" from the Professor.

"Behave," retorted the irrepressible Howell.

"You'd better have that hand taken care of," suggested Miss Towne with some con-

cern. "The house physician will be here shortly."

"Yes, and want to cut it off. No, I'm going to carry that to my grave," he declared.

The entrance of Dr. Christopher, the Superintendent of The Refuge, brought Jack back to earth and work, and he began his notes as best he could with the maimed and aching member.

"Anything new since I went out?" inquired Dr. Christopher of his secretary.

"Yes. A young woman looking for a room. No relatives or friends in the city. The rooms are full, but she seemed so exhausted and discouraged that I could not turn her away."

"Good. I'm glad you did not. We'll find a place for her somewhere."

He looked at some notes on his desk.

"Have you been able to find a place for Miss Brown? She's terribly discouraged after her long illness. We ought to be able to do something for her. What does Dr.

Jennings think about her getting back to work?"

"He considers her quite fit for work now, he says. He saw her this morning," answered the careful Miss Towne. "And oh, by the way, Winthrop Clavering, the author, wants a stenographer. I understand his work is very trying."

As Miss Towne turned to her desk again the stump of a cane and the sharp nasal tones of a man's voice came to her from the hall: "Is this the house of Refuge?" some one was asking. "No, boy, you needn't show me in. I've got a nose and I can follow it."

CHAPTER VI

WINTHROP CLAVERING SECURES A STENOGRAPHER

BOTH Miss Towne and Dr. Christopher looked up with opening eyes at the curious figure that presented himself to them in the doorway. They were used to strange personalities in that retreat of the unfortunate, but never before had they met the type of human who stood before them now. Old grey trousers that were worn thin and flexible like corduroy, a long knitted muffler, big horned spectacles, and long hair just curling at the coat collar—it was certainly a great make-up, thought Jack Howell.

It was Jack who came to the rescue. "Why, see who's here! Talking of the Devil! If it isn't 'Little Nemo,'" he laughed out.

"Don't call me 'Little Nemo,'" exclaimed

the novelist, with an annihilating glance.

"I tell you I don't like it!"

"Then send it back and have the cook warm it over," pursued Jack, eager to draw the quick fire of his nimble-minded adversary.

"Oh, I know who you are; you're that fresh reporter that called at my house once to write me up for your Sunday edition," snorted the author of "The Blood on the Door Handle." "And you misrepresented me and my work. I've a good mind to sue you for calling me 'Old Grape Nuts.'"

He emphasised the threat by dumping on Miss Towne's desk a huge armful of books that he carried. Then wheeling upon Howell he continued: "That paper of yours is no good anyway."

"I know. It prints your stuff," answered Howell meekly.

"Yes, and it's the only thing that's good in the rotten sheet," was the answering volley. "Some day I hope they'll print your

obituary, and I'll write it, too, for nothing, with pleasure."

"Those be harsh words, Bertha," mimicked Jack.

"Don't call me Bertha!" yelled Clavering. "Don't call me anything! Don't speak to me!" He fairly shrieked the words, pounding on the floor with his massive cane.

Dr. Christopher, who had listened patiently to this duel of words, now interposed. "What can I do for you, Mr. Clavering?"

"You don't look as if you could do anything," said the novelist and from this blunt summing up of human values, turned his search-light gaze again upon Miss Towne. "Are you the young woman who wants to work for me?" he demanded.

"No, I am not," was the emphatic reply.

"Glad of it! Glad of it! You wouldn't do at all. No imagination," he retorted. Miss Towne wondered what delicate compliment he would pay next.

"Some one told me over the phone that I

could get a stenographer here," he went on impatiently. "I've got to get some one to take my stories from dictation. I don't want any of your high-heeled, perfume-reeking ladies, who want to come at ten o'clock in the morning and leave at a quarter to eleven. I want some one who can be on the job all the time. Never can tell when I'm going to feel inspired. Sometimes it comes at three o'clock in the morning and I want to dictate then. The girl must live at my house, and sometimes she won't get out for a week at a time. Can't write 'em myself. Bad hand. Bad eyes."

"Bad boy," chuckled Howell, thinking that the author might be too modest to admit it.

"Huh!" grunted Clavering, for once having no reply ready.

"We have a young woman here with whom you may talk," suggested Miss Towne, though without the slightest doubt as to the outcome of the interview.

"Will she stay with me more than a

week?" questioned Clavering irritably. "None of them ever do."

"How strange!" commented Howell musingly.

Miss Towne rose. "I'll see if Miss Brown feels strong enough to talk to you," she said.

"Strong enough!" snapped the author. "Has she been sick? I don't want any ailing women. I had one once. Just as I got to an exciting place in my dictation, she'd have to stop and take Peruna."

"Poor soul! I shouldn't have blamed her if she'd taken poison," chimed in Howell sympathetically.

Miss Towne was leaving the room and Clavering called after her: "Tell her she'll have no time off and little sleep. I never sleep," he explained, turning to Dr. Christopher. "My mother never slept. My father never slept."

"No? They had you on their minds, perhaps," was the explanation offered by the amused reporter.

There was no telling what Clavering's scathing rejoinder might have been if just at that moment they had not been interrupted by the striking of the clock. Nothing could have been more curious than the effect which this simple sound produced upon the noted author. As the last stroke died away into silence he suddenly extended his long arms, up and down, back and forth, round and round, in a fantastic paroxysm, to an accompaniment of gasping grunts. Jack Howell looked on in mute astonishment; he had never seen the old fellow like this before.

"Take them every hour," explained Clavering breathlessly. "Keeps the blood in circulation, and nourishes the brain. Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen—"

Howell, getting the stroke now, joined in the physical pyrotechnics. "Every little movement has a meaning all its own," he sang.

"Don't sing that! Damn it!" grunted the star performer; "I hate Grand Opera.—"

Twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five. Ah!" he panted as he exhaled at last and allowed his waistcoat to resume its normal circumference.

"The next number on our bill will be The Diving Dill Pickle," announced Howell solemnly, but this time he drew no fire.

Refreshed by his exercise Clavering turned upon the unoffending Superintendent. "So you're trying to make people better, are you?" he sneered.

"That is one of our aims," responded Dr. Christopher quietly.

"Well, you're wasting your time," growled Clavering.

"I'm sorry you think so, but—"

"But why should you care what I think?" demanded Clavering, eager to start an argument.

"He doesn't," interposed Howell. "That's politeness."

"I call it lying," Clavering retorted.

"But, my dear sir," began the Superintendent, beginning to get out of patience

with Clavering's almost insulting manner and remarks. The latter paid no heed to Dr. Christopher's protest, but resumed his caustic observations in his same spirit and without delay.

"I've never had any use for churches or missions except for local colour in stories," he asserted. "A church makes a fine setting for a mystery story. Wrote one once called 'The Cathedral Mystery.' I had the murdered man discovered lying on the altar, with the green light from a stained glass window falling on his face."

Dr. Christopher made a grimace of distaste, while Jack Howell exclaimed: "Wouldn't that put your hair in pompadour?"

"The story was founded on the murder of that Catholic priest five years ago," Clavering went on. "And don't forget," here he brought his cane down on the Superintendent's desk unsparingly, by way of emphasis, "that it was *I* who caught that murderer after the police had given up the case." He

paused a moment for effect, his little eyes sparkling with enthusiasm, then suddenly drew the reins over his pet hobby. "Marvellously interesting thing, the pursuit of criminals, full of poetry and romance. Don't you think so?"

"No, I don't," flatly rejoined the Superintendent.

"Then you're a fool," snapped the criminologist, "and you'd better go to an oculist and get your point of view readjusted."

This was a little more than even the mild Dr. Christopher could stand, and he would have liked to make a point of showing Clavering the door, had not Howell, bubbling over with enjoyment of the situation, remarked: "As an authority on crime I suppose that you have already cleared up this mystery at the Beaumont?" and started everything up again.

"Huh! No mystery in that," Clavering retorted, "there may be to you, and a lot of pin-headed detectives. I can see that. They'll go using up money and shoe-leather,

trying to find the woman who called on Morton shortly before the murder. The one they'd better find is that stenographer. Mary Had—Had—”

“Mary had a little lamb,” prompted Jack.

“You keep still,” yelled the author. “Mary Had. . . . Well, whatever the name is, it wasn't her real name. I can tell you that.”

“Oh, you have looked into that affair already, have you?” inquired the Superintendent. He could not conceal his interest in this latest tragedy. “Our house physician was called to the murdered man's room not long after he had received the fatal blow.”

“I went there too,” chuckled Clavering. “The police put me out, but not until I had made a few observations that will entirely escape *them*, with their blundering methods. Idiots!”

“You think, then, that it was the stenographer who killed Morton?”

“I know it was.”

"What do you think was the motive?" asked the Doctor.

"Ah," ejaculated Clavering, warming up to this question. "The motive? That's where they all fall down. All except me. That's the first thing *I* get hold of. She was there to spy on him, I believe; to get information."

"What makes you think that?" put in Jack.

The question brought a withering look from Clavering: "Because I've got a little common sense, that's why. Some one had tried to pry open the man's desk, and all the papers in the drawers had been disturbed, but apparently nothing valuable had been taken. That's why."

"Couldn't the woman who called upon him shortly before his death have been the one that went through his papers?"

"She could have been, but she wasn't. I happen to know that Morton escorted her to the elevator. The police didn't find that out,—but I did." He chuckled over his

sagacity. "No, sir," he continued. "That woman was his friend, an Italian or a Spaniard. No one at the hotel knew what the man was. 'A Mr. Morton in the cutlery business,' they said. Shucks! Morton is an English or an American name," he elucidated contemptuously. "Did you ever hear of an American or an Englishman wearing earrings?"

"Earrings?" exclaimed Dr. Christopher and Jack together, puzzled at the question.

"Yes, earrings! I examined the lobes of the dead man's ears, and there, so faint that you could hardly see them, were the marks of old earring holes. Mr. Morton nothing!" And Clavering went on with a disdainful shrug of his shoulders: "He was an Italian or Spanish member of some cunning gang. The Scarlet Band perhaps; I don't know yet, but I shall find out; you'll see!"

"The Scarlet Band!" exclaimed Howell.

"Yes, the Scarlet Band," retorted the novelist, advancing excitedly upon him. "I

suppose you are one of those smart Alecks who think the Scarlet Band is a myth."

"Oh, no, I don't," expostulated Jack. He had dropped his bantering tone now and spoke earnestly. A sneaking respect for Clavering's prowess was coming out in him.

"Well, it's not a myth, I can tell you that," came the reassertion, with reiterating raps on the cane. "I've written four stories about the Scarlet Band, all of them founded on facts. Facts!"

He paused to look over the pages of *The Evening Telescope*, lying on the table at Howell's elbow.

"H'm!" he exclaimed. "Do you see that?" pointing with his cane to the headlines. "'Conspiracy to Kill Victor Holt. Assistant District Attorney Receives Threatening Letter from the Scarlet Band.' Huh! What do you make of that now?" he growled, as he poked the paper aside with his active stick. Up and down the room he strode, growling like a dog with a bone.

"Ha! ha!" he croaked, "If those fellows got him—"

"And this murder at the Beaumont then," reminded Dr. Christopher, to whom the criminologist's views on the murder were more interesting than his insinuations as to the District Attorney's office. "Why did the stenographer have to kill the man? Wasn't that taking pretty big chances just to get a bit of information?"

This question Clavering apparently weighed a moment in his mind before he answered. "I don't think she intended to kill him," he said. "She stabbed him with one of his own sample knives. That shows that she didn't go there ready armed."

"That's interesting," responded Jack.

"Then, too, my examination of the telephone in his room bears me out in this theory."

"How's that?"

"The desk telephone, which I discovered was a private wire, was lying on the floor by the dead man. What does that show? It

shows that he had been using it; and I learned from Central, who was trying to get it rung off, that a little before five o'clock that afternoon Morton called up the Café Rossamano on his private wire in great haste. Something happened, so Central said, and the receiver fell."

"Café Rossamano!" put in Jack Howell.
"Why!—I—"

"Why! What?" demanded Clavering, scenting some criticism in the interruption.

"Oh, nothing, nothing," replied Jack, trying to look as if the words Café Rossamano conveyed no meaning to him after all.

"Well," retorted the author testily, "the man who interrupts with 'nothing' is a hell of an addition to an argument."

Dr. Christopher, fearing renewed hostilities and fascinated by the novelist's line of deduction, broke in again and urged: "Go on! Go on!"

"And another thing I know," said the author, easily encouraged, "is that he was trying to—"

But at this critical moment in the argument Miss Towne re-entered the room with her message.

"Miss Brown will see you in the ladies' reception room, Mr. Clavering," she said formally. The author sheered off at once.

"Oh! She's a lady, is she?" he sneered. "I don't want a lady, I want a stenographer."

"But, Mr. Clavering!—"

"Now don't give me any arguments," he blustered. "I want a stenographer." He started to follow her, but reaching the alcove where the Professor sat, he paused beside his chair: "Hello, Kaufman! Got that translation ready for me yet?" he demanded in passing.

"Not quite, Mr. Clavering. I'm working on it now."

"Good Lord! While you are digging out a paragraph, I could write a cyclopedia!"

"But, Mr. Clavering, it takes time, it takes time!"

"Yes, and by the looks of your nose it takes rum, I should say."

With this graceful and tactful sally, veering from one grievance to another, the novelist quitted the room, and Dr. Christopher was left with Jack to finish the speculations on the murder.

"What a strange character!" observed Dr. Christopher.

As for Jack Howell, he was deep in his own reflections. The Café Rossamano! Clavering said that the murdered man had called up the Café Rossamano. Could the tragedy at the Beaumont be linked in any way with his own strange encounter in front of the Rossamano? It must have been just shortly after the murder that he had gone to the girl's assistance there. Had he all unconsciously been sucked into the whirlpool of some conspiracy? What could he do?

"You'd better come in to my office and let me try to make that hand of yours more comfortable," said Dr. Christopher presently. "You will have trouble with it if you

don't. Come this way," he added, and opened the door of a room at the right.

"Thank you, sir," said Jack appreciatively. "I shouldn't mind having it eased up a bit, I must confess."

He started in the direction of the doctor's office, but was waylaid by Professor Kaufman with "Excuse me, sir. Could you let me have a little money? I am obliged to get some more copy-paper before I can finish Mr. Clavering's work, and he won't give me any until it's done."

"Well, there you are," said Jack. "That's for copy-paper, mind you now; don't come back with a package."

"Thank you, sir! Thank you, sir," mumbled Kaufman, taking his hat and shuffling toward the door.

Howell looked after him a moment. "Poor devil," he exclaimed, then followed the superintendent into his office and closed the door.

It was certainly a relief to have some one

patch up his poor hand and tend it a bit. The iodine stung awfully at first, but presently the fever in his fingers began to cool a little and he sensed the comforting and comfortable sensation with true gratitude. "Thank you, Doctor," he announced cheerily; "don't you forget to put in your little bill rendered for this veterinary service now. Jack Howell, *Telescope Office*—Oh, yes you must now."

The doctor's ministrations over he returned to the living room again and paused a moment on the threshold. The room was empty and deserted,—a barren field, he thought, for any more writing up of Sunday specials. He didn't seem to be making very good connections, he must say, to-day. No one was there. No sound broke the stillness anywhere, save the ticking of the big-faced clock on the wall, and—yes—hullo! There was somebody after all, seated at the telephone. "By Jove!" exclaimed Jack quite sotto voce, "the girl from

the Rossamano! The girl with the eyes! What the deuce is she doing here, and in such a state of excitement too?"

Half instinctively, more in the spirit of not wishing to interrupt than of eavesdropping, he drew back and waited, listening. The girl held her face very close to the receiver and spoke in a low, hurried tone.

"Give me six-eight-seven Chelsea. Hurry, please!" she breathed tensely to the unseen Central. All the time she kept glancing toward the doors, in most palpable suspense. At last the answer.

"Is that you, Uncle Mark? Quick, listen! This is Margaret. Has Victor come home yet? Oh, no word from him?"

Jack could hear her almost sobbing.

Her ear was so close to the transmitter that she could not hear the slight squeak of a board beneath his foot and still Jack listened. His impulse was to advance with assurance and claim acquaintance with her, but at her next words, uttered in an agonised tone, he paused again.

"There is? For me? With the red band? My God! How did it come? By messenger? Bring it to me at once. The Refuge, 16 Irvington Street. Come yourself and be careful! Have you seen the *Evening Telescope*? Yes. It's true. I can't explain. I—"

Then at last she seemed to sense a presence in the room and stopped abruptly, hanging up the transmitter with a trembling hand, not daring to look around.

Howell saw a tell-tale crimson flame over the pallid face, heard her tense breathing as she hastily seized a pencil and made a pretence at writing. He even thought he caught the quivering of her eyelids. Poor thing!

Who was she? What was the trouble?

A suspicion that had been forming in his brain while she was at the telephone, flared now to conviction. Was she Mary Hadfield, the girl wanted for the murder of Morton? Could it be possible, this slip of a girl? Then the instincts of the reporter

who scents a scoop seized him for a moment, despite his sympathy. What a chance! If she were the murderess and he should be the first to detect her—What a scoop!—

He advanced a step or two toward her “Well?” he said, looking fixedly at her.

The girl raised her head and gave him back the look bravely. No sound came from her dry lips. Her face was as white as the paper on the desk before her, but no fear showed in her eyes, and there was no tremor or trembling in any feature.

“Well?” said Jack again nonchalantly. “What can I do for you?”



“‘WELL?’ HE SAID, LOOKING FIXEDLY AT HER.”

CHAPTER VII

A NEW CONSPIRATOR

"WHO are you?" asked the girl presently, in a tone of such composure that it brought a smile to the reporter's lips in spite of himself.

"She's a cool one anyway," Jack thought. Advancing a step nearer to her he answered: "I don't know yet. But I think—I think I'm your friend. I'm not sure though."

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

Howell paused a moment, then said significantly: "You'd better tell me all about it, don't you think, if I'm to be your friend?"

With an almost imperceptible start the girl turned to the papers on the desk again, as if to sort them out and turn the subject. "I really don't know what you are talking about," she said. There was even a tinge of

amused tolerance in the tone that she achieved.

"Oh, yes, you do," went on the relentless Jack. His pride was pricked by that last cool parry; he would break down her guard. Lowering his voice he took a sudden resolution, and lunged the accusation: "You killed that man at the Hotel Beaumont, didn't you?" He watched the effect of his thrust narrowly. The uncontrollable look of terror that for an instant made ghastly the already pale face, made him wince despite himself.

"It's not true," came the hoarse denial. "I have just come here from Chicago."

"Oh, no, you haven't!" began Jack.

"I tell you I have," countered the girl, struggling vainly to give conviction to her words.

Howell took a copy of the *Evening Telescope* from his pocket and rattled it ostentatiously. "What was it that you told your Uncle was true in the *Telescope*?" he demanded.

She shrank back at that, then made a desperate effort for control. "I was talking about something quite personal," she protested weakly.

"Oh, no, you weren't. You were talking about this." He thrust the paper with its accusing murder head-lines before her startled eyes and watched her.

"I'll not endure your insults any longer!" the girl retorted, regaining her poise with an incredible effort, in spite of her terror and anguish of spirit. She rose with imperious dignity and made as if to leave the room.

"Wait!" called Jack. His tone was softened now. What a valiant soul she was, he thought, after all. Why should she be in peril from him? Was it his business to hunt her down, to pursue a defenceless girl because she was at his mercy before he really knew her story? She was no ordinary criminal, he could see. Why had she committed murder, if she had committed it? It was his business to find out that before he sentenced her.

He changed his tactics, and said gently: "See here. I've got a hunch that you're in wrong. Of course you may question my right to talk to you as I do, but you know I'm not quite a stranger, am I? We've met before, I think. Don't you remember?"

She did remember, he could see, but would not say so; perhaps this friendliness on his part was but another attempt to trap her into a confession, she might think. She must be careful.

"No," she replied, again looking directly into his eyes; "I have never seen you before."

"No?" smiled Jack. "Well, perhaps my face isn't one to get *matinée*d on; but as for me I've got a memorandum of our meeting in this nice little bunch of forget-me-nots here." He drew his bruised and swollen hand from his pocket and held it out for inspection.

"Oh—!" She gave a little crooning cry, but again she checked herself.

At that "Oh," all tenderness, solicitude

and remorse blended, a sound that could only be the utterance of a gentle heart, a great wave of emotion flooded Jack's frame and brain. It was impossible that a girl who looked with such compassion upon an injured hand could kill a man in cold blood! No, no, his brain protested; she must have been justified in some way! There must have been some awful provocation! His man's heart took up arms in her defence outright. How could he help her? But first he must gain her confidence.

"Come on," he said, with kindly insistence. "Tell me everything."

She turned to him, her grey eyes questioning his as though to read his very soul, and her lips parted. But before she could utter a word the bang of the outer door sounded interruption. Instantly the hunted look was on her face again. In an instant too she and Jack were allies together against a common danger.

"Get busy!" commanded Howell in an undertone.

The note of warning in his voice made her return to the chair at the desk, blindly obeying him, she knew not why. The outer door of the room opened, but she dared not look to see who entered.

Howell, meanwhile, seated at the opposite side of the room, saw reflected in the mirror before him the burly form of a police officer framed in the doorway. He caught his breath. So soon! What was the man's errand! Had he come already to arrest this poor girl? Well, if he had, he shouldn't get her. She was his! His prize! Fate hadn't sent him first to the Café Rossamano, then here, for nothing. She was his. His mind was clear as to the issue. He had been sent to stand between this girl and ruin. "And by Heaven I'll do it!" he swore passionately.

With these thoughts surging through his mind, he greeted the officer. "Hello, Captain Ryan," he called in a loud, affable tone, emphasising the new-comer's rank to pre-

pare his companion for what might be coming next.

"Hello, Howell!" gruffly responded the officer, in whose precinct this latest murder had been committed; and who did not like it. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh, getting some dope for a Sunday special, and missing all the good things," answered Howell disgustedly. By giving special emphasis to "missing all the good things," he was hoping to get some inkling of Ryan's errand, and start communications.

"Well, you missed a good thing this afternoon, all right," said the wearer of the blue coat, taking the bait in a tone of satisfaction. He didn't always like reporters; they were always butting in, he said; but he tolerated this one because, as he told Howell, "he liked his comedy."

"Got any new dope yet on that Beaumont murder, Captain?" inquired Jack in a casual tone.

"No. But I'll have some soon. Who's in charge here?"

As he asked this question the white cat, which had been roaming about the room in a disturbed, restless fashion, approached Margaret, and rubbing against her skirt, gave a spring and landed on the desk in front of her, settling on its haunches and gazing with its emerald and sphinx-like eyes upon the officer of the law. With a sudden frightened longing for warmth and comfort, the girl put her hand softly on the animal's back and stroked it. A prodigious yawn was the only recognition the cat made of her touch; then it settled back again to its steady gaze at **Ryan**.

"Who's in charge here?" he repeated, and nodded his head in the direction of the girl at the desk. "That young lady the bureau of information?"

Surprised at this sudden turn of affairs, Margaret was nevertheless quick to see the solution it might hold for her. She glanced

toward Howell, who, standing behind the officer, gave her an encouraging nod.

"Yes," she replied sweetly. "What can I do for you?"

"How long have you been on duty?" demanded Ryan sharply.

"She was here when I came in at about four-thirty," put in Howell quickly.

"Four-thirty?" repeated the officer.

Margaret had taken her cue.

"Yes," she answered promptly, "I think it was just about four-thirty."

"Was it you who answered the phone when they called up from Headquarters a while ago?"

"Yes."

Howell watched the girl breathlessly, ready with a signal if she needed it. With a wisdom born of fear she avoided answering him with her eyes.

"Any one entering from the street would be seen by you?"

"Yes, Captain." She answered now without hesitation.

Howell's clenched hands relaxed. "Great Scott! But she's a corker!" he thought fervently.

"You told Headquarters over the phone that you had never placed from your employment bureau a stenographer by the name of Mary Hadfield?"

"No, we have no such name on our list."

"Sure?" demanded Ryan in his most inquisitorial tone.

"I am positive," was the decided answer.

"Well, if a woman who looks at all suspicious should come in here to-night, detain her and notify me at once. I can't give you a description of her, because she'd only been in Morton's employ a few days, and those boneheads at the Beaumont don't seem to know what the skirt looked like. But we want her, and we'll get her if I myself have to investigate every employment bureau in New York City. So long, Howell."

He turned away and Margaret gave a sigh of relief at being freed if only for a moment from the relentless look he had fixed

on her during his colloquy. Then she grew rigid again as she heard the young man asking Captain Ryan: "Oh, it's the stenographer you're looking for, is it? Do you think she's the one who killed Morton?"

"Naw," replied the Captain, disgusted with the supposition. "The woman who killed Morton is the Spanish dame that called on him about four o'clock."

"Oh, that's the idea, is it?" exclaimed Howell, as if tremendously impressed.

"Why, sure," continued Ryan patronisingly. "It's the old jealousy stuff. But if the stenographer was there when she called, she can give us a description of the foreigner, can't she?"

"Oh, I see. Of course you're anxious to find her, yes. Well, I hope you get her," said Howell heartily.

"Oh, we'll get her all right," retorted the Captain, adding with a half sneer of vindication, "The Police Department ain't as rotten as you newspaper guys try to make it out."

"Oh, I say!" expostulated Howell, as a loyal member of the maligned press.

"You say! do you?" sneered Ryan. "Every newspaper in town is panning us," he added with a snarl. "That nut, Victor Holt, started it. Everything was all right till he butted in. To hear Holt talk you'd think there wasn't an honest policeman in New York."

"Well," said Howell, who was in sympathy with the Assistant District Attorney, "is there?"

"There you go!" angrily retorted Ryan, and then went on in a querulous tone. "Now what chance have we got, with every one against us? We didn't do nothing to Holt. He got sore because every man in the department wouldn't give up all his time to chasing those White Slave fellers. We've got a few other things to attend to besides that."

"Of course you have," agreed Jack. "So that's why Holt turned you down and took on the Byrnes men, eh?" he questioned.

Howell, while seeking information, was not innocent of the intention of getting back at the Department for its malice and disloyalty to Holt, whom he admired.

"Yes, he took on the Byrnes men," assented Ryan, then added with a chuckle of contempt, "and a hell of a lot of good they'll do him. Did you see in the paper where Holt got a letter from that Scarlet Band bunch?"

"Yes, I saw that."

"Well, I hope they get him. Serve him right!" muttered the officer vindictively, as he started to leave the room.

A determination to keep in touch with any information the Captain might acquire concerning the Beaumont affair, prompted Jack to speak again.

"Oh, by the way, Captain," he suggested, "you know, as I was down here refuging, I wasn't in on this murder story. If you get any good stuff slip it on me, will you?"

He rather ostentatiously drew a bill from his pocket as he spoke.

Ryan saw the bill, but drew up his six feet with dignity and glared at the insult to his uniform. "What do you take me for?" he demanded, mortally offended. "We cut all that out long ago, you know that. Nothing doing!"

"Oh, no offence," said Howell apologetically, and rather deliberately dropped the bill on the carpet.

Ryan turned to Margaret with a parting injunction. "Don't forget what I told you, Miss, if anything new turns up let me know. Good-night!"

On his way to the door his eye fell upon the money. "Hello!" he called, as he stooped and picked up the seductive yellow-back. "Some one's dropped a bill here. Is it yours?" he asked, turning to Margaret. The girl shook her head. "Yours?" he asked, giving the reporter a quizzical stare.

"Oh, no, no," the latter answered with a look at the officer which suggested the doctrine of losers seekers, finders keepers. Ryan was not slow to catch its import.

"Why, I must have dropped it myself when I came in," he said and slipped the bill into his pocket.

"Good-night!"

From the window Howell watched the Captain's figure out of sight. Then he turned to Margaret again. She had risen, and seemed wholly unconscious of her companion's scrutiny, as if rapidly reviewing the events of the last few minutes.

"Well," she said at last bitterly, "if you learn that stenographer's story, you will have your scoop, won't you?"

In reply Jack only fixed his eyes upon her with an approving smile. "Well, you got away with it! It was immense. You never turned a hair," he said exultingly.

"I wish you would go away and let me go on by myself," replied Margaret anxiously.

"Oh, that isn't the next thing," said Jack emphatically. "You know you are waiting here for something that your Uncle is to bring you. Yes, I heard all you said over the phone. Come on, now," he pleaded.

"Tell me what happened at the Beaumont."

"I have never been at the Beaumont. What right have you to question me?" she cried, with flashing eyes.

"What right have you to sit there as Miss Towne and answer that copper's questions?" he retorted. He had dropped his coaxing tone now; he realised that she must be driven to the wall if he hoped to get the truth from her.

"You—you—frightened me. I didn't know—" Her lips quivered and for the first time the tears welled up in her eyes.

He understood, and again he changed his tone. "Come, come now, little girl. Listen. I *know* you did it."

"No, no, I tell you, I did not!" she protested vainly in a low, strangled tone. She glanced fearfully about at the doors, to see if any chance of rescue were at hand from this inquisition.

"But I *know* you did." He paused a moment. "And I've got a feeling that in some

way or other you were justified. Now if you're really on the level, you'll tell me all about it and I swear I'll help you. Now, now, come—"

"There is nothing to tell," she persisted desperately.

"If that copper gets hold of you they'll give you the third degree, you know," hinted Jack. He spoke meaningly. "They'll never let up on you. You know that, don't you? Now what are you going to do?"

In answer she moved towards the door. "I'm going to leave this place at once," she sobbed in dismay.

Howell barred her exit. "Oh, no, you're not," he said.

She recoiled from him trembling. He realised the crisis his next words must precipitate, but he did not flinch.

"Well?" There was no kindness in his voice now, nothing but an unalterable demand for her confession. He saw her clenched hands, sensed her dogged determination not to surrender. Then like the

hunter who sees a wounded animal at bay and fires the fatal shot to end its struggles, he launched his final words.

"Do you want me to phone the police and tell them where they can find that stenographer?" he suggested. He watched her narrowly, and caught the shiver that ran through her slight body. "Do you?" he demanded again, as she made no sign. "Very well!"

He reached for the telephone. The click of the receiver broke her rigid calm. With a cry she turned to him, shaken at last. "Don't give me up! For God's sake, don't give me up!" she sobbed.

Howell placed his hand over the transmitter to shut out her voice. "Well?"

"I'll tell you everything," she said brokenly.

"Never mind, central," called Howell to the waiting operator. "A mistake; I'm sorry."

He hung up the receiver again and turned to Margaret.

"I didn't mean to kill him," she moaned. "I swear I didn't mean to kill him." She sank into a chair and buried her face in her hands. Her body was shaken by convulsive sobs. She looked so fair and tender and defenceless that Jack could have gathered her up into his arms and petted her into quietude like a wayward child. He put his hand reassuringly on her shoulder.

"Don't lose your nerve now. Don't, you'll need it," he said. Cautiously glancing first in the direction of the doors, he drew a chair to her side. He hated himself for having brought this added anguish and torture upon her head, but there had been no other way.

He waited a moment for the sobs to cease, then said again: "Now tell me quickly. Take a chance with me," he urged. "It's the only one you have."

She hesitated. "If I thought I could make you understand . . ."

"Try. Tell me. Who was the man who

grabbed you, down there this afternoon at the Rossamano!"

"One of the gang."

"What gang?"

"The Scarlet Band."

"The Scarlet Band?" he gasped. "Good God! What have you to do with such villains?"

She clenched her white hands. "What have I to do? I've been fighting them for more than four years."

"You? Fighting *them*? Why, you are only a child," expostulated Jack. Was she trying to lead him into a new false scent?

"A child!" she looked a little bitter smile at him, then continued: "My brother and I together have been fighting them with every ounce of our strength."

Now, in every word, in every syllable she uttered, Howell caught the spirit of indomitable courage and fortitude. She was magnificent. He believed she was true.

"Your brother? Who is your brother?" he queried.

"Victor Holt."

"Victor Holt?" he repeated in amazement. "What Victor Holt?"

"The Assistant District Attorney."

"The Assistant District Attorney? Your brother?"

Jack Howell could not have been more surprised had she told him her brother was President of the United States. "But your name is Mary Hadfield."

"My real name is Margaret Holt," she said quietly.

"Well, for Heaven's sake!" he gasped. "Here. Let me get this. This thing at the Beaumont had some connection with the work you and your brother were doing?"

"Yes."

"Well, look here!" he said eagerly. "If you're his sister you can't be very wrong. I'm for Holt and the work he has been doing. I'm for him strong, and he'll win out in spite of these coppers. You're telling me the truth now, sure?"

"The truth," said Margaret Holt, bitterly.

He was silent a moment before he said, looking at her with grave eyes: "Well, if you have the Police and the Scarlet Band both against you, you'll need the help of God and the angels." He took her two slender hands in his as though she were the lady of his colors, to whom he was swearing fealty. "I'm going to help you. Come, tell me the whole story now of this four years' fight you have been making. How did it begin?"

And Margaret Holt, turning her lovely head from Howell until he could see only the coiled mass of her hair and the bit of white neck between it and her gown, began her story. With fingers clasping and unclasping she told it all, not sparing it, told it with hesitations and interruptions, falteringly, but quite truly, as she felt his sympathy and wish to help. It was not a pretty story, and it was not told with art or gloss, but the cruel circumstances of it wrought for sympathy. Fashioned of the raw facts of life it made

even Jack Howell wince, hardened as he was to the crimes and passions of mankind; made him wince even while he loved, and could almost have wept with the keenness of his compassion for, the teller of it.

CHAPTER VIII

MARGARET'S STORY

MARGARET's story began in quiet country ways and pastoral moods to end in city filth like many another poor girl's tale before it. It began on a lovely day in June, when a brother and sister stood in the railway platform in the little town of Chester, up in Maine.

Victor Holt was a sturdy, wholesome fellow of five and twenty. Margaret, who stood beside him, with tears in her wonderful grey eyes, was a slight girl of seventeen, to whose cheeks the Maine breezes had given the bloom of roses. The parting for these two was very hard, especially for Margaret, who was to be left behind. New York sounded very distant and remote to her that day, and Victor had been a devoted brother that she would sadly miss. Their parents

had died when they were still little things, and even as a boy he had assumed the responsibilities of a man over her life and keeping, and she could hardly bear to have him go. Uncle Mark, too, who had lived in New York for many years, had tried to dissuade him from entering a field where influence and money and new conditions counted so much towards success; but Victor had answered, "I know that I have neither money nor pull, but I feel that I shall win out, and anyhow I can take a good licking."

As the distant whistle sounded through the hills, Margaret's hand gripped her brother's more closely. "It's hard to have you go, Victor," she said, with difficulty steadying her voice, "but I know that it is for the best and that you will succeed. I just know that you will. You can't help it."

"Succeed! Of course I shall, honey, and it won't be long before I send for you to come to New York to keep house for me," Victor replied proudly. And Margaret's

face had brightened wonderfully at the prospect.

With a heavy heart Margaret during those first days returned to old Judge Hawley's office, where she made herself useful as his stenographer. Her brother had read law there, and the kindly old man, who had been a dear friend of their father, had made them realise the interest and love and care that he should always feel for these children of his old associate. As Margaret came into the office to resume her work, the Judge, noticing the expression of loneliness in her eyes, gave her a friendly little tap on the shoulder and exclaimed: "Now don't you worry about Victor! He's bound to win out. He's a clean boy and that means a healthy mind; he'll succeed, he'll succeed. Lord! but you'd know that to look at his face." And as the old man thought of the inflexible decision of the boy's mouth, he chuckled to himself again. "He'll succeed all right."

And then before long there was Victor's

first letter. He had taken an office down town and had hung out his shingle. "VICTOR HOLT, ATTORNEY AT LAW." "It looks great," he wrote, "but Uncle Mark can't see it with a telescope. And now grasp your chair and be prepared for a shock. I have a client! A regular client! My client's name is John McKimmell, and Uncle Mark tells me that he is a well-known man here!" He closed his letter with: "If only I had you here with me, Sis. Well, if good fortune continues, it won't be long before we are together again. Shouldn't I like to see you toggled out in some of the fine feathers I've seen in the Fifth Avenue shop windows! Why! I've spent my first one hundred four times on you already."

Again and again the girl read the precious letter: she laughed at what he wrote about the Fifth Avenue fashions. It was just like Vic to think of her. She knew that he would like to spend his last penny on her; and that night with the letter tucked under her pillow she prayed for his success and for the day

that should end their separation. She drifted off into the land of dreams at last where a venerable old gentleman, dressed in the most fluffy and diaphanous of Parisian gowns, chased her brother, who shed guns at every leap, into a house which flaunted in every window, the legend For Sale.

The winter wore on, each week bringing a newsy letter from New York. Victor was getting on. Mr. McKimmell, his client, was pleased with his work and had given him more. His association with a man of such influence brought him in touch with other interests and led to more work, work for which he had a special aptitude. What little money he was making over expenses he was saving, he wrote, towards furnishing an apartment for himself and Margaret to share.

There were many things to look back on in those days, as for instance when the expressman brought to that little Maine town a wonderful box for Margaret, containing her first evening gown and a note

from Victor. He had seen it in a shop window, he said, and it looked like her, so that he couldn't resist the temptation to buy it for her; she was to have her photograph taken in it and send him the picture at once.

Summer came and in its train a disappointment for Margaret, for Victor wrote that he should be unable to spend his vacation with her as he had planned; that things were coming his way and he must stay "right on the job." There was just a flash of sunlight in the closing lines: "If all goes well I shall soon be able to take that little apartment and have you come to me." The hope that these words inspired lingered with her all the long Summer days.

It was October when at last the summons came from Victor to join him in New York. "Dear Sis," he wrote, "pack up your duds and come on. I've taken an apartment up on One hundred and fourteenth Street; three rooms and a kitchenette."

Uncle Mark was going to live with them and stand half the rent. The place was

small and the three of them would look like a crowd in it. She was to take the Bar Harbor express from Ellsworth, and Victor was to meet her on the arrival of the train at the Grand Central Station in New York. She was to come as soon as the Judge could find some one to replace her in the office.

A few days later she watched Judge Hawley from the city-bound train until he became a mere speck in the distance. The receding vision of her native hills brought a mist to her eyes. She was going forth with such confidence, such glowing faith in life and human nature. Alas, how soon were the realities of life, the latent, lurking evil things of life in a great city, to dim her youthful trustfulness!

The journey was one long series of new adventures for the little county girl. First there had been the parting with her old friend, Judge Hawley, though the sadness of that had been relieved a little by the wonderful watch that he had placed in her hand when he said good-bye to her. He had at

the same time given a greenback to the Pullman porter and charged him to look after her comfort.

The hours did not seem long, everything was so new to her in this first experience of all night travelling. She enjoyed her breakfast in the dining car, with its corps of waiters in spotless white coats and aprons, who managed their loaded trays so dexterously in the swaying of the train. She enjoyed the ever-changing landscape, and when darkness came, pictured to herself her brother's impatience for her arrival. She wondered what she should do if he were not there to meet her; but of course he would be.

When the baggage transfer agent came through the car, following her brother's instructions, she gave him her check, taking the address from her purse to be sure that she made no mistake. The lights along the track were becoming more numerous all the time. "Yes, they would soon be there," the porter told her, as he carefully brushed the dust from her coat over the bald head of the

gentleman in the next seat to her. Slowly the train pulled into the great dreary station, and the tired passengers crowded into the aisles in their eagerness to leave.

Margaret, clutching her little satchel in her hand, stepped from the car to the platform. Everywhere the porters with red caps were rushing about in search of patrons. The girl had expected that her brother would be on the very steps of the car to meet her, but the train porter laconically told her no one was allowed to come beyond the roped enclosure. She walked on a little bewildered, towards the expectant group of people waiting outside the train gates, and looked for Victor among the crowd, which, as it absorbed the incoming travellers, gradually melted away but did not resolve itself into her brother. He was not there! A great wave of loneliness swept over her, and the tears gushed to her eyes. Where was Victor? The station seemed so immense and she such an atom in the rush of people hurrying by her. What should she do?

Choking back her tears, she inquired of a white-capped official if there was any other place in the station where people awaited the arrival of passengers, and was directed to the waiting room above. Taking fresh courage she finally reached the place designated, losing her way once or twice in the perfect maze of passageways the re-construction of the station made necessary.

In the waiting room she looked anxiously all about, but Victor was not there either. Now thoroughly frightened she decided to take a cab and seek the address her brother had given her. She opened her satchel to look for it, but alas, the purse containing her money and address was gone; she must have dropped it when she arranged for her baggage transfer. It was all too tragic. She tried to recall the street and number. Was it One hundred and seventieth West, or One hundred and fortieth West, or One hundred and forty West One hundred and seventieth Street? The combinations were inexhaustible. The more she thought, the more

jumbled they became. She thought of telephoning to Victor's office, but it was now after seven. He would not be there, and anyway she had no money. The moments passed and still her brother did not come. She was almost panic-stricken with fear. She hurried back to the train levels to find the porter of her car; he might have picked up her purse. But she reached the gate where her train had arrived, only to learn that the cars of her train had been backed out and that the porter was off duty. She was told that if any one of the train crew had picked up her purse it would be at Room 528. She hunted for Room 528, but found the halls dark at that hour, and closed.

Again she sought the waiting room. The place was no longer crowded, but still there was no sign of Victor. Once she thought she saw him, and moved impulsively forward, only to discover that it was a stranger, who smiled at her and called her "Sweet-heart." Frightened and angry she turned away, seeking the ladies' waiting room,

where she thought at least she might be free from annoyance.

She was just deciding that the only thing to do was to stay where she was until morning and she could telephone to her brother's office, when she was approached by a middle-aged woman, modestly dressed and of a most respectable appearance, who apparently was willing to be of some assistance to her. Margaret had seen her in the main waiting room and had noticed that she looked at her rather curiously. The woman seemed now to hesitate before speaking to the girl, and then said, gazing at Margaret's flushed and anxious face with a benevolent smile, "Are you looking for any one?"

"Yes," the girl replied. "My brother. He was to be here to meet me."

"Who is your brother?"

"Victor Holt. He is a lawyer here in New York," said Margaret.

The woman gave a little exclamation of satisfaction.

"Well," she exclaimed, "I thought you must be his sister, but I wasn't sure. I might have known, though, you look so much like him."

"You know my brother?" Margaret asked eagerly.

"Oh, yes, we are great friends. He sent me to meet you. I've been looking for you ever since your train came in," explained the elder woman.

"Oh, did Victor send you to meet me?" cried Margaret, in great relief.

"Yes; he was detained himself on important business," the woman said.

Margaret was so relieved that no suspicion ever entered her head. "Oh I've been so worried," she confided. "It's the first time I have ever been in New York, and I seemed such a mite in the crowd. I think I lost my head. I could have gone directly to the apartment, but my purse, containing my brother's address, has disappeared. They had taken a new flat, Victor and Uncle Mark, and I have been awfully stupid about

remembering the number. I think these numbered streets are so confusing to a stranger, don't you? Poor old Judge! I'm afraid he sent his telegram too late."

"You poor child! I don't wonder that you were anxious," said the woman. "But you are all right now, aren't you?" She spoke with such kindly interest that Margaret felt a growing sense of relief in being with her.

"What did you do with your luggage?" she asked presently.

"I gave my trunk check to the baggage agent on the train. Wasn't that right?" asked Margaret.

"Oh, yes; come on! We'll take a taxi and go right up to the house. It's getting late, and your brother will be anxious."

The woman led the way out of the station and past the cab-stand. "We won't take one of these," she explained; "they are a lot of robbers. We can get one on Forty-second Street for half the money."

As they walked along she talked pleas-

antly with Margaret, and in such an ingratiating way that the girl placed her arm in that of her protector and chatted excitedly about her journey to the city without any further thought. She did not see the woman exchange glances with a sinister-looking man standing at the entrance to the station, nor did she see the man hurry away to where a limousine waited across the street and hold a hurried conversation with the chauffeur.

"Oh, there's a cab over there," said the woman as she piloted Margaret across. "Get in, my dear, I'll tell the chauffeur where to go."

Blindly following directions, Margaret got into the car and gave a sigh of relief as she sank back into a corner of the comfortable seat. She was tired out after the long journey and the excitement of her arrival. For a moment she closed her eyes from sheer exhaustion. There was such a noise and rumble of traffic that she could not hear what the woman was saying to the chauffeur,

though she was dimly conscious of something strange in it.

The woman got in herself presently, and the chauffeur, slamming the door after her, put his car in motion.

"Is it very far from here?" questioned Margaret weakly.

"Oh, no, dear, we'll be there before you know it."

The swinging car turned out of Forty-second Street and into Broadway, and Margaret had her first glimpse of The Great White Way.

They sped on at a rapid pace, so rapid that once even the woman from New York knocked on the window to the chauffeur to be more careful. He continued recklessly notwithstanding. Margaret asked her companion if it were not dangerous, but Mrs. Watson, as the woman had by this time named and introduced herself, took little pains to reassure her, only muttered something about "that fool of a chauffeur." Finally they stopped with a jerk before a

high stone house, and "the fool of a chauffeur" alighted and opened the door of the limousine for them.

"Here we are," said Margaret's companion.

As they were climbing the high flight of steps, the chauffeur stopped the woman with a rough demand for his "rake-off," and she handed him a bill, whereat the fellow only grinned, saying: "Come on, now, dearie. Come across with another five. I'm not taking chances at this game for nothing, you—" An additional bill slipped into his hand shut off any further remarks.

Margaret, in her eagerness to see her brother, was already half way up the steps and paid little heed to the wrangle between her companion and the driver. She had heard of grasping cabbies, before. The woman followed her, and opening the door explained to her that her brother's apartment was on the fourth floor. It had just occurred to Margaret that in her "greenness" and excitement she had entirely omitted to

thank her companion and protector, Victor's friend. She turned to express her thanks and make polite inquiries. They had reached their landing, where the woman opened a door, and before Margaret had time to realise her intentions pushed her violently into the room and turned the grating key in the lock.

It had all happened so suddenly that even up to that moment Margaret had suspected nothing. She did not grasp the situation all at once. Then came a flash of understanding. This was not her brother's apartment. She had been trapped. In her terror she cried out "Victor! Victor!" But there was no answer anywhere.

She tried to find the door, but whichever way she turned, the dense mystery of darkness baffled her. She groped about until finally her fingers touched the cool metal of a door-knob. She tried to make the door yield to her struggles. She threw herself against it, a furious sense of frustration maddening her. She beat at the panels till

her hands were bruised and bleeding, but to no avail. She never knew how long she fought for freedom, but gradually her strength gave way and she sank to the floor of her prison sobbing in a paroxysm of terror. Who was this woman who had brought her to this house? What place was it? What was the meaning of it all?

Listening intently, she caught the sound of voices in the hall—coarse voices and words followed by shrieks of laughter. Gathering up what little remaining strength she had, she made another frenzied assault upon the door, but the only result was a horrible, ominous silence that seemed to settle like a pall over the house.

Then slowly, slowly into her mind crept the meaning of it all. Her very heart stood still in fear and horror. She remembered now having read of the fate of girls who had been lured to wicked houses and been compelled to live lives of shame and degradation in them. It could not be that she—she,—

Margaret Holt, was to know that horror. She must be dreaming!

Then the wicked, cunning, busy little sprite of imagination sprang to life and painted in lurid, screaming colours, the revolting possibilities of her fate. Shudder after shudder shook the slender body until the sleep of youth, whom neither bolts nor bars can lock out, dropped over her beaten spirit the merciful cloak of unconsciousness.

CHAPTER IX

A WHITE SLAVE

THREE weeks dragged by, during which Margaret was compelled to submit to such a bondage, to treatment so atrocious and inhuman, that those who become its victims must be either dragged down hardened into the pit by it, or choose drink or drugs or death as an escape from infamy and torture.

At first the belief that her brother must come to her rescue kept the spark of hope alive, but as the interminable days wore on without any word or relief from him, even that feeble light died out and left her groping in the darkness of despair. The thought of escape obsessed her, but at every attempt she made, at every struggle, the guards of her prison closed in more securely on her.

She was never permitted to leave the house. An enclosure on the roof, like a

prison yard, was her only means of taking the air. A total stranger to the city, she could get no idea of location. She could see the street below her, with its long line of shuttered dwelling houses, but where the street led to or what it was she had no idea. Many times she was tempted to throw herself from the roof upon the pavement below, but each time some indefinable power had kept her from taking the fatal step.

One day a policeman called at the house and Margaret happened to be in the hall. At the sight of the bluecoat her heart beat high with hope. At last! The law would protect her and punish those who had held her to this iniquitous servitude. But her agonised appeal for protection brought only fresh despair and disappointment. The policeman only laughed at her and turned her off.

“What have you to kick about?” he smirked. “Haven’t you a swell home here? Cut out your baby prattle and forget it!”

Escape came near her in another quarter,

too, but passed her by—came in the shape of a pistol that she found by chance, and put away in her room. She would put an end to her horrible existence. She could endure no more. God would understand. With a fervent prayer for strength and courage, she brought from its hiding place the little, shiny revolver that a man had dropped in the hall the night before. She gazed at the thing with fascinated eyes; it was the only key that would open the gates to freedom and impenetrable eternity. For one moment the pendulum of indecision swayed between life and death.

Then, as with steady hand Margaret raised the pistol to her temple, the door burst open, admitting a youth of not more than twenty, whose flushed countenance and staggering steps told the tale of some protracted debauch. Margaret whirled about, hiding the revolver behind her, while the youth stared at her with a silly leer about the corners of his sensuous mouth. The girl stood like a tigress watching him, flaming with rebellion.

To her surprise he only reeled back against the wall and whimpered in a maudlin tone: "Don't be cross with me, dearie! You hurt my feelings, that's what you do. I don't want anything of you. I only want to go to sleep, d'y hear? Go to sleep! Beautiful sleep! And don't wake me up for a year!"

As he spoke he removed his soiled and rumpled garments, scattering them about the room in every direction, until, losing his balance, he fell headlong upon the bed, and sank quickly into a drunken stupor.

Margaret gave a long, quivering sigh of relief, as she realised that for the present she was safe once more. Stealthily she returned the revolver to its hiding place, then mechanically began to gather up the garments that the sleeping man had scattered on the floor. As she did so, a sudden thought vitalised her benumbed brain. At last she had her opportunity for escape! She balanced the chances of success or failure. It took her but an instant to decide. God was good! It must be success.

Stealing to the bedside she bent over its prostrate occupant and listened to his heavy breathing. She shook him to make sure that he was more than dozing. Good! She could not rouse him.

He was of her complexion, with black hair, and of about her height, she noticed. It was all providential.

Hastily slipping out of her gown, she put on the youth's clothes and his long overcoat, over them, then the tall silk hat. Her reflection in the mirror satisfied her that she might elude detection, but she must hide her hair beneath the tile. There was such a mass of it that try as she would, she could not conceal it at first beneath the hat, and only by close braiding got it all hidden at last.

Passing out of the room into the hall, she listened breathlessly. The house was still. Summoning all her courage, she descended the stairs, lurching as she proceeded, in feigned intoxication in case any one should hear or see. She was half way down the last flight, when the opening of the door of

Mrs. Dumont's parlour almost stopped the beating of her heart for good and all.

But Mrs. Dumont, thrusting her frowns head into the hall, only gave an exclamation of rage. That kid had been deposited in her hallway only a short time before by a grinning chauffeur and she ordered him thrown out; why was he here still? Who had dared to disobey her orders? As she beheld the reeling figure in the dimly lighted hall she broke into a storm of oaths and abuse, and seizing the youth by the shoulder and flinging open the door pushed him out vigorously herself, exclaiming: "You get out of here now! Go home, and don't you come here drunk again! Do you hear?"

In another moment Margaret found herself sprawling on the side-walk and heard the front door close with a slam behind her.

Bruised and hurt by her fall, she rose to her feet and ran as fast as her legs would carry her; in what direction she knew not, she had but one idea—to put as great a space

as possible between her and that awful house.

She had covered a distance of some two blocks when the burly form of a policeman loomed in the distance. Once she would have turned confidently to the blue-coat for protection, but her experiences had taught their lesson. Darting into a doorway, she crouched in its shadow in breathless suspense till the man had passed, then seeing him at a safe distance from her she started again on her mad flight.

Turning a street corner, she came next into sudden collision with a portly priest, and before the benign and astonished Father could regain his breath had thrown herself into his arms with a despairing cry for protection.

"Save me!" she gasped between spent breaths. "Save me, for God's sake, save me!"

"What is it?" cried the priest as he looked into the face upturned to his in piteous ap-

peal. "Save you from what? What's happened to you, my boy?"

"I'm not a boy," faltered Margaret; "I'm a girl!"

"A girl!" exclaimed the astounded priest. "A girl, are you? And a slip of a one at that. What are you doing, running about the streets in togs like this?" he added sternly.

Margaret, believing that his cloth meant protection, told her story without reserve or hesitation. As she finished her tale the priest in him became submerged in the man. "The fiends! The devils," he exclaimed. "I'd like to take off my coat and go there this very minute and clean out the dirty sink-hole."

"You won't let them take me back? Oh, you won't, will you, Father?" pleaded Margaret.

"My child, I'd protect you from the devil himself," said Father Connelly.

"Then please, please, take me to my

brother. He can't know what has become of me or he would have found me by now."

"I'd take you to him this minute if we could find him. But we'll have to wait till I can get him at his office in the morning. You have nothing to fear now, my child, you are safe. Come with me. Only a few steps away you will find love and tender care awaiting you."

With comforting assurance he half supported, half carried Margaret to the iron gates of the Home of The Sacred Child in Forty — Street.

"Here we are," he said cheerily. He had no sooner spoken than he felt the arm of the girl relax its hold upon his own, and her unconscious body slipped down upon the pavement before him in a faint.

Tenderly lifting her in his arms, he carried her into the Convent and laid her upon a couch, hastily summoning a Sister to his aid.

Slowly, fearfully, Margaret regained consciousness. It was as though she drifted through a sea of clouds, in which flashed sud-

den, lurid fragments of dreadful things. In the distance she heard a clock strike the hour, and then the clamouring echo of the chimes.

She roused herself with a start. "Where am I?" she moaned.

"Hush, child," answered a sweet voice. "Rest, dear, you are safe among friends."

She stroked the girl's burning forehead, hoping to calm her into sleep, and Margaret's troubled eyes fell upon the gold cross that hung from the slender chain about the Sister's neck. She reached forward and clasped the little thing in her hand. With its touch her eyes closed. A feeling of peace settled on her. She was back again in the little church at Chester. The thick, white clouds were closing in upon her again fast, and through the mist came the voice of the dear old clergyman who had christened her, reading his favourite psalm. The voice died away, and she drifted with the clouds back into unconsciousness, and then on to dreams.

She sat on the bank beside the old river.

The sun was flooding it with evening colours, tipping the church steeple with glowing carmine. To Margaret's cheeks it lent its colourful brush as well, but its glow could not reach her heart or warm it. She thought of the past months; of the terrible illness which had brought her to the very gates of death. Why, why had the Sisters brought her back to life, she wondered dully. Here in Chester with the dear old Judge she was safe; he only knew her story. But what could life hold for her now? It was Spring. The world of nature had awakened, and was full of hope and expectation. For what had she the right to hope? She, like other girls, had had her happy dreams—but no! She must not think, she would not! She had promised Victor. The ripple of the flowing water caught her ear. There was the river; there was the solution of her problem. What was there to prevent her from slipping silently out to sea by way of the river?

She sat absorbed in her rebellious thoughts, until gradually the beauty of the

scene about her sank into her consciousness. The river sparkled and rippled on its way, happily and cheerily fulfilling its mission; near at hand the cattle in the meadow peacefully nibbled their evening meal, and high in air a night hawk gave its queer shrill call.

Her spirit roused from its brooding and stretched its wings once more towards the light. How marvellous was the world, how splendid its achievements! The sense of her degradation dropped from her like a cloak. A growing knowledge of power and good lifted her face to the hills.

Christ had suffered and toiled that others might be saved, she told herself. Why should she not go back to the world, and struggle shoulder to shoulder with the brother she adored, to work with him to save from misfortune girls like herself?

Glowing with the fervour of self-consecration, she sprang to her feet. A shower of petals, loosened from the tree above her by the caress of the soft wind, drifted down

upon her shoulders. She must hasten, the Spring was growing older fast.

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Four years had passed since the day Margaret had appeared at her brother's office beseeching him to let her have a part in the war he had begun against the iniquitous traffic that had blighted his sister's life. At first he had protested in horror, but the girl had met and demolished every argument he advanced, and finally won his consent to her participation in his work.

Together they had worked, together they struggled against obstacles that would have disheartened the most valiant. The first discouraging failure had been the attempt to arrest Mrs. Dumont. The police could not or would not locate the woman. They moved so slowly always that she had plenty of time to run to cover. From the precinct Lieutenant, Holt turned to the precinct Boss, but they were all alike.

He turned to his first client and benefac-

tor for advice. McKimmell listened to Victor's story with grave attention. "My boy," he said, with a sad smile, "you are making a vain struggle against a mighty force—graft. I happen to know something of the precinct you are trying to work against. Why, even if you secured the arrest of this fiend in woman's garb, I doubt if you would be able to get her convicted. I have spent a vast amount of time and money helping reforms of every nature and description, and I know whereof I speak."

"But what can I do? Surely I am not to let that woman and her kind go unpunished," urged Victor.

"Work independently of the police."

"But how?"

"Hire the best detectives in New York City."

"But I haven't the money!"

"I will take care of that. I want to see you win out. Start a crusade against this White Slave traffic. I have the money.

You have the youth and determination. I believe you to be the man for the cause, the man to win out."

With the philanthropist's aid, Victor Holt commenced the fight. Step by step, day by day, year by year he and Margaret worked together. Rescuing here, preventing there, occasionally securing a conviction and an arrest, unswervingly, persistently they pushed on the work. Though Margaret shunned all publicity and no one in her brother's office knew her face, her co-operation was more than efficient, nevertheless.

Meanwhile a new man had been appointed District Attorney, Horton by name. His office would be no sinecure, for all the strength of his department was needed now to cope with the wave of crime that was sweeping over the city, flouting morality, outraging decency. The Scarlet Band, the most notorious gang of criminals that had ever sported in the underworld, was rapidly coming to be a terror and menace to society. Abduction, burglary, murder, all were grist

to its mill. So well organised was it that the police were completely baffled at every attempt to round it up. There could be no mistaking any one of their enterprises; their trade-mark was always left behind; a mocking letter to the blue-coats, in an envelope encircled by a scarlet band.

The District Attorney, who had recognised Holt's fighting qualities as the kind of metal now needed in his office, made Victor his assistant, inciting him to wage war against this band of criminals with all his strength and all the facilities his office afforded. Realising what this recognition of his work by the authorities meant to him, Holt took fresh courage and pushed relentlessly on. The first intimation that he had touched the gang in any vital place came when he had received a message scrawled on a piece of paper, encircled by a scarlet band, which read: "Victor Holt: You fool with us, we make you a dead man. We mean what we say and do it. Beware!"

With an exultant laugh, Victor showed the

note to the District Attorney. "See that!" he exclaimed. "We've hit them! We've hit them! We'll get them now!"

It was in the struggle to "get them," working side by side with her brother, that Margaret had come again into deep waters—had dealt too keenly with the Scarlet Banders and in the end was hanging on the precipice of real imprisonment.

CHAPTER X

THE MURDER OF JAMES MORTON

BRAVELY and fully Margaret told her story, told it all. At times she must pause and could hardly go on. When she uttered the words: "One day a great brute of a man—" with a strangled cry of agony she buried her face upon her arms outstretched upon the table.

The reporter was staring down at her with eyes of unutterable sympathy and horror. "God!" he groaned between stiff lips. And at that moment the boy in Howell's nature slipped away forever, leaving in its place a man ripe with power to contend and to prevail. "Oh," he thought, "if I could only take her away from all this, shield her, make her forget!" Then a fresh realisation of the peril she was in at that moment swept over him: "Go on!" he urged hoarsely.

Rallying her strength Margaret told of the events that led up to the moment when she reached the Rossamano.

Closer and closer the net was drawn in about the Scarlet Band. Victor and his indefatigable workers were full of hope that the end was in sight.

It was in November, when the suspicions of Holt's right-hand man and ablest detective, Bill Flynn, were aroused by the actions of James Morton, a man residing at the Hotel Beaumont, where he occupied a suite of apartments and ostensibly carried on a cutlery agency for the St. Louis firm of Hillsdorf & Co.

It was not so much Morton himself, who made Flynn suspicious, as the strange customers, mostly Italian or Spanish, who called upon him. In the person of one of these the detective had recognised a man, a foreigner, who had been arrested some time before for being implicated in the White Slave traffic, but had escaped conviction because of some flaw in the evidence against

him. Furthermore Holt had sent a letter to Hillsdorf & Co. asking for the name of their New York agent, and the letter had been returned, bearing information from the postmaster that there was no firm of that name in St. Louis.

Again Flynn had seen several "want" advertisements cut from the papers which read suspiciously, and referred the applicant, always a woman, to "Suite 5, Hotel Beaumont."

"Suite 5 is occupied by our friend Morton," said Flynn. "We ought to send some one down to land that job of stenographer."

"You're right, Flynn," agreed Victor. "But whom could we send? We've no one on our staff who knows enough about stenography to make good even in that position. I wouldn't trust an outsider. Who the Dickens can we send?"

"Send me," suggested Margaret, who had been a silent but attentive listener.

"You!" ejaculated her brother. "Non-sense, not for a moment."

"But I know stenography," persisted Margaret; and she added quietly but firmly, "I shall try for that position."

So that was how one day Margaret Holt called at the Hotel Beaumont and was shown to Mr. Morton's apartments on the third floor.

As she waited for the cutlery merchant to interview the one other applicant present she had an opportunity to observe the man, and did so carefully.

He was of middle height, with heavily built shoulders. His face, which had the swarthy complexion of the Latin, was hard and cruel, and from a sinister expression about the mouth derived an evil look which the cold, piercing eyes, glowering under bristling eyebrows, curiously accentuated. He was immaculately dressed, and had almost the language and the manners of a gentleman.

Evidently the applicant to whom he was talking was too experienced or was not pretty enough. "No," he concluded curtly. "You won't do. The work does not call for

one of your experience, or the pay which you should command. You know too much. Thank you for calling," he added courteously as he opened the door. "Good day!"

Margaret inferred that Mr. Morton was not looking for brains, and decided that it was her cue to appear rather dense. She answered the questions he put her with as much obtuseness as she could feign.

"H'm," mused Morton, after a moment's deliberate study of Margaret's face. "You'll do. Oh," he added as though weighing her usefulness, "do you understand Spanish or Italian?"

Margaret's heart sank. After all was he going to say that she wouldn't suit. "No," she faltered, "but I can learn."

"It doesn't matter," he said quickly. "We can manage all right. It's only that many of my customers come from the Italian quarter, and you might have to wait on them."

Crossing the room he opened the door on the right. "The typewriter is in there,

where you will do your work. This is my sample room," he explained as he pointed to a long table upon which were displayed samples of cutlery of divers sorts. "When can you begin work?"

"Now," replied Margaret in feigned eagerness.

"Good-a!" For the first time Margaret caught a slight accent. He gave her some papers, instructing her to make several copies of them, as they were his new price list. "By the way," he said, as he called back, "I forgot to ask your name."

"Mary Hadfield," answered Margaret promptly and started again for her work-room. She had almost reached the door when three sharp rings from the telephone on Morton's desk arrested her. She turned to answer the call but Mr. Morton hastily took off the receiver before her. "*Savelli!*" the word passed from his lips with a sharpness quite in contrast to the languid tones in which he had addressed the girl. Before he

spoke again he placed his hand over the transmitter, as though to muffle the resonant voice of the person with whom he was in communication, and turning towards Margaret said sharply, "What are you waiting for?"

"I thought you spoke to me, sir," she said stupidly.

"I did not. Close your door and begin your work," was his snarling command.

Margaret obeyed. Evidently Mr. Morton had business of an extremely private nature. With her ear to the key-hole, she listened carefully, while Morton in rapid and excited tones continued his conversation at the telephone. He was speaking in Italian, but once Margaret caught the word "Holt." Presently he stopped speaking and she heard the click of the instrument as he hung up the receiver. Instantly she sprang to the typewriter and began a hurried manipulation of the keys, blundering hopelessly as she tried to imagine what significance the name Holt

might have in that conversation. Her conjectures were interrupted by the opening of her door.

"I'm going out," said her employer briefly. "You may go when your work is finished. Do not come till ten in the morning."

"Very well, sir," she replied, and began to work on her typewriter laboriously.

The outer door closed after Mr. Morton and she gave a sigh of relief. For a few moments she sat motionless, thinking of the queer work she had elected to do. She was there to spy on this man, to get all the information she could about him. She hated the part of a spy; but she had volunteered to do it—and do it she would, to the best of her ability.

Hoping to get some clue of value she first tried the desk. It was locked. The wastepaper basket yielded no secrets either. A door on the left, partly concealed by a portière, stood ajar; quickly she opened it, and perceived that the room beyond was a bed-

room, probably Morton's. She entered and made careful but fruitless search of the drawers of the dresser; examined the ample supply of clothing that hung in the closet and was rewarded by finding two letters addressed to Pedro Alvarez, General Delivery, New York City. They were written in Italian and signed "Savelli." Her heart gave a bound as she remembered that Savelli was the name she had heard Morton repeat at the telephone. She had three names now. What was the bond of interest between James Morton, Pedro Alvarez and Savelli, then?

Her conjectures were suddenly terminated by an imperative knock on the door. Waiting only to conceal the letters in her blouse she answered it and two men confronted her as she opened the door. One was a tall, wiry Italian, with a scar across his cheek which gave to his face a horribly malevolent expression; the other a Jew, small and meagre, whose shifty eyes and nervous snapping of the fingers gave the impression

of a man in constant apprehension of danger.

The tall man scrutinised Margaret coldly and then pushed by her into the room, leaving the Jew to take his stand at the window, from which he nervously watched the street below.

"Mr. Morton, is he not here?" questioned the Italian.

"No," answered Margaret. "He left an hour ago."

At her reply the Jew snapped his fingers impatiently and his companion smothered an oath between his teeth. "When will he come back?" demanded the latter roughly.

"He did not say," answered the girl, beginning to be seriously alarmed in the presence of this evil-looking pair.

Again the tall man gave her a piercing look as he asked, "You his new stenographer?"

"Yes, sir," said Margaret.

The two men began an examination of the cutlery displayed on the table, talking ear-

nestly in undertones as they did so. Margaret strained her ears to hear something of the conversation, but whether it referred to business or personal matters, she could not determine.

At last the Jew left the table and went to the window again, and after making another careful survey of the street, telegraphed the result of his scrutiny to the other by a nod of the head. Apparently this was a signal that the coast was clear in the street below, for the two men at once made their way to the door.

"Will you leave your names?" Margaret inquired in a business-like tone.

"Say Mr. Savelli and Mr. Weinberg," replied the tall man; "I will call Mr. Morton later on the telephone."

The following morning Margaret was at her post a little before ten o'clock. Morton, taking his Continental breakfast of rolls and coffee, paid little heed to her as she entered, merely telling her to make more copies of the price list. There were no customers at

all during the day, and as her employer did not leave the apartment she found no opportunity to continue her investigations.

At about four o'clock, however, Morton received a woman caller, for whom he himself opened the outer door of the apartment. Margaret saw the woman as she entered and threw back her heavy veil before Morton came and quickly closed the door of her room. Through the partly opened transom above came the sound of their voices, the woman's having decidedly the accent of Southern Spain. From the glimpse she had had of the beautiful, sensual, highly-coloured face and from her salutation "Mia Pedro" Margaret knew this foreigner to be a member of the band.

"Why did you come here, Juanita?" demanded Morton savagely. "Haven't I told you that it was dangerous?"

She began a reply in Spanish, but the man interrupted her with a curse. "Speak English. I cannot follow that Castilian

dialect of yours. Why did you make such a bungle of that last affair, when you had the girl almost in your hands?"

"I could do nothing," the woman answered meekly; "there is now always some of Mr. Holt's men to watch."

"Holt! Pah! He thinks our warning to keep his hands off our affairs is a joke. He has strengthened the conspiracy by not believing it. I have it all arranged for him soon. The fool!" Margaret could hear the rapid pacing of his steps. "The fool!" he went on. "Either there will come an end to our business or to him. How does he know our plans? Who is the traitor?"

"We had better leave New York, Pédro, before it is too late," urged the woman anxiously.

"Run away! Confess myself beaten by that fool Holt? For two years we have made monkeys of the police, why not of him?" he demanded scornfully. Then after a moment: "What brought you here to-day? What do you want?"

"The list of the members of the Society," she answered in a trembling voice.

"Ah, the list! Yes!" He hesitated a moment. "Yes, you must have it to notify the members of the meeting at Guiseppe Pelatro's on Saturday."

"It is no longer safe to meet at Guiseppe's."

"Not safe! Why?"

"It is watched."

At this information Morton grew almost purple with passion. "Some more of that damned Holt's work I suppose. Tell Savelli to come on Thursday at five o'clock for the list. If I am not here he will find it"—he crossed the room till he came near the door of his bed-room, then bending, pulled up a corner of the carpet—"there. Do you understand, Juanita? There."

"Yes, yes," assented the woman. "On Thursday he is to come at five o'clock for it and if you are not here he will find it there."

"Good," he ejaculated. "Tell him not to worry. Tell him," raising his voice a little

in vicious exultation, "that we'll have nothing to fear from Holt after Thursday."

"What are you going to do? Oh, Pedro, do leave New York."

"Leave? I?" he cried scornfully. "Not I. I'm safe, I tell you, safe."

"Safe, Pedro! I tell you that man Holt is watching us, marking us down, checking us for prison, every one of us!" Her voice rose almost to an hysterical scream on the last word.

"Hush, you fool," cautioned Morton. Then he added soothingly: "You stay and have dinner with me, Juanita. Go in there until I call you." He pushed her into the bedroom and closed the door, and after waiting a moment opened the door of Margaret's room, saying as he did so: "You may go now, Miss Hadfield, and you need not come again until Friday, business is so very slack."

But with the morning came the conviction that she must go to the Beaumont that day at all costs. She must get that list be-

fore Savelli came. How could she get into the apartment, she wondered. Morton had told her not to come back; doubtless he had given instructions to the hotel people not to admit his stenographer if she came there.

With her mind alert to every chance of success or failure, her heart beating hard and fast, Margaret made her way to the Beaumont. Entering, she avoided the elevator and climbed the stairs gradually to the third floor. There she peered down the hall and to her surprise saw that Morton's door was open. She crept to a dark hall-way almost opposite and could hear him giving directions to a porter to take his luggage down and order a taxi for him.

What could be the meaning of this? Was he preparing for flight? Was he taking the list with him? No, Savelli was to come for it at five o'clock, and it was now only half-past four. There was still the chance that the paper lay safe in its hiding place..

On tip-toe she approached the half-open door. She heard Morton moving about in

his bedroom. Quietly she stole into the sample room, then into the room where she had worked. Here she crouched in the darkness by the window, reasoning that if she heard him coming she could creep out on to the fire-escape which she knew was there. Her heart was beating so hard it seemed to her that Morton must hear it. Her body grew cold with fear as she realised her situation.

In a few minutes, it seemed hours to the girl waiting in agonised suspense, she heard the man come out of his room, close his desk with a bang and switch off the lights. Then the hall door slammed and she knew that she was alone.

Waiting until after she heard the elevator descend, she groped for the light button and pressed it. Where to look for the list she did not know, but crossing to go to the bedroom her foot, as luck had it, struck a ridge in the carpet. Down on her knees she went, and pulling up the corner of the carpet she found a long sealed envelope beneath it.

At last she had found it! Slipping the precious thing into her blouse, she was just rising to her feet when she heard the sound of a key in the lock. This time her very heart stood still. She was trapped like a rat in a cage.

She had no time to hide. As Morton entered the room, she stood with her back against the wall, her two burning, glowing eyes, the only spots of colour in her white face.

Morton stepped quietly into the room, closing the door behind him and slipping the bolt into place, glaring at the girl. Then his eyes travelled from her to the desk with its opened drawers, to the knife lying on the floor beside it. There was a cruel smile on his lips and his eyes glistened.

“So—my little stenographer—spy, eh! Well, I have my spies, too. That’s how I know who you are! You devil!” he almost hissed the words. “You should have been more careful, my dear. You should have returned those two letters!”

Margaret's stiff lips refused to open, her brain was suggesting and rejecting plans with the rapidity of lightning; her eyes were fixed on Morton in a fascinated stare.

"Your brother," he continued slowly, as though he meant every torturing word to sink deep into the girl's mind, "is now at the Café Rossamano, dining with a friend. Three of *my* friends are waiting for a word from me to put an end to him, do you understand? To put an end to him." He moved as he spoke, to the desk, and grasped the telephone. "I am going to give that word *now*."

Margaret sprang towards him. "No, for God's sake, no! Take your vengeance upon me if you will, not upon him. Not upon him!"

"I'll take my vengeance on you all right, too, after I've settled him," he sneered. Then, "Give me 983 Spring," he cried.

"No! You shall not give that word," Margaret called hoarsely, as she sprang upon him, trying to take the ear piece from him.

With his free hand he caught the girl by the throat and held her down against the desk, while he called, "Is that you, Savelli? Holt"—Margaret's left hand came loose with desperate force, covering his mouth. With an oath he caught it and thrust it away. As he bent her backwards, her right hand came in contact with the knife lying on the floor. A wild impulse to save her brother came to her with the touch of the cold steel. She seized the knife and before Morton could move, with all her magnificent young strength, had struck it into him above the heart.

With a groan, the wretched man dropped the instrument he was holding, and staggered back against the wall. Then, snatching at the house telephone as he swayed, he muttered into it thickly: "Quick! I have been—stabbed by a—woman. She—" and then he fell.

Margaret gazed at his lifeless form in horror. Had she, Margaret Holt, done this thing? The dripping knife still in her

hand answered her. She grew faint and sick and would have fallen, had not the sound of voices and hurrying feet warned her to keep her senses. She must escape, she must get the papers to her brother. She could not get out by the door, she would meet the alarmed household. She steadied her frenzied mind. She must think! Quickly she turned to the room in which she had worked, gently opened the window and climbed out on to the fire escape, made her way down swiftly and dropped to the ground. Across the street was a cab. Jumping in, she said to the driver: "Quick! To the Café Rossamano."

CHAPTER XI

CLAVERING'S NEW NOVEL

"AND that's where I came in," repeated Jack Howell. "But what became of your brother there? Have you no idea?"

"Two men dragged him across the street to a taxi," said Margaret. "They had not received the word from Morton to put him out of the way, so I think they took the chance to kidnap him."

"And this in New York City, in the Twentieth Century," ejaculated Jack. "And you—to think that a little girl like you should pit yourself against these demons! How could they let you do it?"

"You won't give me up?" she cried again.

"Give you up?" He caught her hands in his and drew her towards him. "Never, never as long as I have strength to hold you! I—" Her soul seemed to be looking at him



W. H. L.
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CHARLES FROHMAN.

"AND YOU—TO THINK THAT A LITTLE GIRL LIKE YOU SHOULD PIT
YOURSELF AGAINST THESE 'EMONS!"

through her eyes. "You mustn't look at me with those eyes," he said with an attempt at his old cheery manner. "It gets my mind off my work, and," growing serious again, "there's a big work to be done, and from this moment Jack Howell is on the job."

Bang went the street door again. Margaret slipped hurriedly behind the desk and Howell took up his station where he could watch the revealing mirror from behind a newspaper.

A grey-haired man entered quietly, as he did so casting a cautious, stealthy glance, first at the girl, then at the reporter. The latter became uneasy. Was this a plain-clothes man who had tracked the girl here? Watching from behind his paper, he saw the new-comer go to the reading table, and remove his hat, always with his eyes on Margaret. Next he saw him push a book from the table to the floor, purposely.

At the sound, Howell saw Margaret start and look towards the man, heard her give a little cry and turning quickly saw the

stranger give a warning look in his direction.

"It is all right, Uncle," she whispered.

"Uncle!" The reporter understood and turned to meet the stern eyes that scrutinised him so keenly.

"Are you her friend?" demanded the old man.

"That's your best little bet!" said Howell, as he looked towards the girl to confirm his eager assertion.

"It's all right, Uncle, he is our friend. You may speak before him. Did you bring it?" she asked breathlessly.

"Yes." He drew from his pocket a scroll of paper around which Howell saw a scarlet band. With trembling fingers the girl took the mysterious missive to the light on the desk.

"What is it?" questioned Howell eagerly.

"It's a letter from them. From the Scarlet Band." For a moment the dread of what it might contain made her pause, then with a nervous effort, she tore off its flam-

ing insignia and opened it. The message ran:

TO MISS MARGARET HOLT: WE KNOW YOU NOW AND WHY YOU KILLED JAMES MORTON. YOUR BROTHER WE HAVE. THE PAPER LEFT IN MORTON'S ROOM IS GONE. PLACE THAT PAPER EXACTLY LIKE YOU FOUND IT UNOPENED, IN A BOOK ON LAST SEAT, RIGHT SIDE, ST. ANNE'S CHURCH BEFORE TEN TONIGHT. IF THIS YOU DO NOT DO—YOUR BROTHER IS DEAD.

Margaret drew a long quivering breath as she finished. Howell clenched his fists. "They wouldn't dare," he muttered. "Is there anything more?"

With an effort she cleared the mist from her eyes and read on,

HE IS SAFE AS LONG AS NOTHING IS KNOWN, BUT IF YOU GO TO THE POLICE, BEWARE!

The letter dropped from the girl's hand. "Oh, Victor, Victor! What shall I do?" she moaned.

Howell, stunned and stupefied, could make no answer to her pitiful appeal; it was Mark Wilson's hoarse, strained voice that brought him to his senses.

"They've got him. That's sure. And they won't stop at anything, you know that. You do what they say, get that list back to them and get it back quick! Oh, if you and Victor had only listened to me!"

"It is the one thing to do," agreed Howell.

"Yes, my uncle is right. We must get the list back to them at once." Margaret spoke calmly and deliberately now.

"Where is it?" demanded the reporter.

Thrusting her hand into her blouse she drew forth the envelope and gave it to him.

He looked at it closely, "Why, it is sealed!"

"Thank God that it is," the girl replied fervently. "They demand that it be returned unopened."

As Howell felt of the envelope his hands twitched with excitement. "But are you sure that this is the list they want?"

"Yes. Why else should they be so eager to get it back?"

"That's right. But if you send them this without first learning its contents, all your work, and all you have suffered, is gone for nothing."

"Oh, what does it matter, if only I get Victor back. I can do nothing alone. Together, he and I can begin all over again," she said wearily.

"But if you send this," urged Howell, "they've got what they want, and then what is to prevent their killing your brother sure enough?"

"They won't do that," interposed Mark Wilson, "as long as she is alive."

"No, my uncle is right. I know too much. See," she pointed to the letter: "'Your brother is safe so long as nothing is known.'"

"But is he?" persisted the skeptical Howell, who doubted if the Devil himself would be safe with that gang.

"Won't they hold him to keep her quiet?" suggested Uncle Mark.

"Yes: you are right. That is just what they will do. I guess there is nothing for us but to come across with the goods." He looked at the sealed envelope. "I wonder if I could pry it open?"

"No, no! Don't try!" begged Margaret. "Remember it must be returned as I found it."

"All right! I won't," Jack reluctantly assented. "But it seems a shame to give that up. They would have to come and take it from my dead body if I had my way." Again his twitching fingers felt of the envelope as if by some mysterious power of touch he might read its contents. "It's written on a piece of card-board," he exclaimed. Then with uncontrollable curiosity he held it up before one of the wall electric lights: but to no avail. It remained im-

penetrable. "I can't see a thing," he cried impatiently. He hated to acknowledge himself beaten in his first encounter with the Scarlet Band. But so far he was forced to admit defeat.

What should his next step be? "I have it!" he called. Then as his idea crystallised he exclaimed, "I've got it!"

"What is it?" asked Margaret eagerly.

"Trust your Uncle Dudley! Will you trust me?"

"What is it?"

"Never mind. You leave it to me." Jerking his watch from his pocket; "How much time have I? I can make it," he calculated. "Good!" Then he unfolded his plan. "I will take this thing to the church myself."

"No, no," protested the girl; "it would be risking your life. One of the gang who was at the Rossamano might come for it and recognise you."

"I'd like nothing better than to meet any one of those pirates again."

"No, no, you don't know them as we do!"

"I would not chance it," advised cautious Mark Wilson.

Howell reflected for a moment. It was taking a chance, he knew. If he were to play any part in this desperate game he must not be known to any member of the gang. "Perhaps you are right," he agreed finally. Then he caught at another idea. "Wait a minute! I know a man, Andy Rivers; he's a down and out reporter hanging round our office. He'll do anything for two dollars."

"But he might ask questions," cautioned Margaret.

"All he will ask is, do I get the two?" declared Howell. "I'll get Rivers to take the package to the church while I hang round somewhere and see who comes to get it. Then I'll trail the gink and perhaps get a line on where those gangsters have your brother."

"Find Victor?"

"Why not? It's a long chance, but let's

try it! We won't call ourselves licked yet! Now if any more of those pink notes come from the crime set, just get them to me at the *Telescope* office," instructed Howell, handing the elder man one of his cards. "And mind!" he added emphatically. "Not a word to the police; you understand that!"

"Yes, absolutely," Wilson replied. "I know the danger there."

So Jack took up his hat to depart on his pilgrimage to St. Anne's. Then he stopped and looked gravely at the girl. "But what about you?" he asked. "You can't stay here."

"Yes, I can. Miss Towne said she would find some place for me."

"But it wouldn't be safe. You have got to live in a vault till we get this thing over."

"He is right," agreed her uncle. "They would kill you and Victor both. You know they would!"

"But where can I go?"

"I could take you to my mother," suggested Howell. "But if those ginks should

spot me they might find you, too. You have got to disappear, that's all!" he said vehemently. "But where, where?" Walking up and down he tried desperately to think of some solution to his problem.

"I don't want any of them. They won't do at all!" Clavering's petulant voice sounded from the hall. He continued to pay his respects to an employment bureau where he had had to search hours, *hours*, unsuccessfully for a stenographer, respects that were copious and valuable.

Miss Towne, looking flushed and angry, followed him into the room and came directly to Margaret. "My dear," she said in an undertone, "I heard Dr. Christopher go out, and I knew that you were all alone here, but I just didn't dare leave that ugly man to talk to those girls alone. I knew that he would frighten them to death. Of course they won't work for him, the brute!"

Clavering continued his complaints. "Tried to hand me a nice lemon with that last one! She started in by kicking at the

hours! Must have my sleep," he mocked. "Only fools need a lot of sleep!" He began to gather up his books.

Howell looked at him. Was this a dispensation of Providence? "You want a stenographer?" he inquired of Clavering.

"Yes," he snapped, "but I guess I'll have to have one made to order."

"Why don't you try this young lady?" asked Jack, indicating Margaret.

Clavering shot an inquiring glance at the surprised girl.

"Are you a stenographer?" he said.

"Yes, sir," Margaret replied at once.

"Don't sir me, or I'll have to Miss you, and I won't stand that," Clavering growled.

"She has done very good work for me," Howell interposed. "She's all right."

"How much sleep do you require?" the novelist demanded.

"I can do with very little," smiled Margaret.

"Well, that is all you are likely to get. You look more intelligent than most of those

dolled-up ladies. Do you want the job?"

Margaret looked at Howell. "I should like to try it," she replied.

"Come along then, I'll make the salary all right."

Without further parley, he turned to gather up his books again; then suddenly stopped to ask her an important question. "Do you know anything about crime?"

Margaret and Howell started at this unexpected bomb.

"Crime? What do you mean?" the girl faltered, shrinking before his piercing gaze.

"H'm," he chuckled. "You will before you have worked long for me. I eat with it. I sleep with it." He began wrapping his crane-like neck in the folds of a worsted muffler, preparatory to departing.

"It's just the thing," Howell explained in an undertone to the bewildered girl. "He lives like a hermit. You can disappear in his house. I will keep in touch with you."

This conversation, carried on in an under-

tone, did not escape the eagle eye of the novelist. "Oh," he said, coming to Margaret. "There's another thing I forgot to ask you." He gave a questioning look towards Howell. "Have you got a feller?"

"Why, I don't know what you mean," replied the puzzled girl.

"A feller, a sweetheart who will come calling on you and interrupt my work."

"No, I have no sweetheart."

"Good! Don't ever have one. The last stenographer I had left to be married. Married! Rot! No woman is interesting after you have lived with her a week! No man is interesting after you have talked with him an hour."

Further comments were cut short by Miss Towne. She did not feel that she ought to let Margaret take this position; yet she had no good reason to offer in objection. She approached Clavering. "I am sorry that you thought that Miss Brown would not do," she began graciously.

The novelist snapped her up. "I don't

think. I know. Besides, I have engaged this young woman."

At this moment Howell received a shock. He saw Captain Ryan passing the window. He must not come in and discover, through Miss Towne, that Margaret was not the Secretary. "Excuse me, Miss Towne," he said quickly, "if you will ask Miss Brown to wait a moment perhaps I can put her onto a position."

"Certainly. I will go at once," the secretary answered, and left the room. Her exit was timely, for the officer was just entering.

"I want to use this telephone," he said, stepping to the desk.

"Go as far as you like, Captain," replied the anxious reporter. "It isn't mine."

"Spring—"

Howell drew a long breath and Margaret shivered. Ryan was calling headquarters.

"This is Ryan! Anything new? Fine! I thought so!" With a grin of satisfaction he hung up the receiver and turned to Howell, who tried to return his gaze with one of

unconcern. "Well, I got the right dope on that case. We've got the woman who killed Morton!"

With difficulty the reporter answered, "That so? Who was it?"

"Why, I told you! The Spanish woman who called on him this afternoon. Just pinched her. Oh, we're a lot of muts, are we?"

"Yes, you are!" almost screamed Clavering. "Spanish woman! Bosh! I tell you it was the stenographer."

Ryan threw back his head with a hoarse guffaw of laughter. "Little Nemo! The boy sleuth. Always hands me a laugh."

"Yes, and I'll hand you something else," retorted Clavering, "if I catch the real murderer and walk into Headquarters with her."

"Oh mercy, listen to him! You couldn't catch your own feet."

"I couldn't, eh!" screamed the irate author, shaking his cane. "You wait till I show you and your graft-fed blue-coats up for a—"

"Aw!" retorted the maligned officer with a contemptuous jeer, "Get out and pump! You've got a flat tire!" and stalked out leaving Clavering white and choking with rage.

"Did you hear what he called me?" he sputtered, appealing to Howell. "Did you hear? He called me a flat tire. I'll show these blue-coated pills up for a lot of blatant jackasses. I'll write a story about this murder that will show exactly how it was done. Come on!" he commanded Margaret. "We must get right at it to-night."

With this declaration he again gathered up the books he had let drop during his altercation with Captain Ryan.

"What shall I do?" whispered Margaret to Howell. "Suppose he finds me out? He will give me up to the police! Then Savelli and his men will know!"

"It's too late now to turn back!" urged Jack. "You are not safe here a minute longer. It's the only way. We've *got* to chance it!"

"Come on!" broke in the criminologist.

"I've got the first chapter in my head already. We'll write it to-night and I can get it published by next week, and before I get through I'll have Morton's murderer in the Tombs! Come on now!"

Howell stood rigidly watching the girl as Clavering led her out. At the door she turned, and he caught a glimpse of terror-haunted eyes and a white face under the red hat. Then she was gone.

CHAPTER XII

JACK HOWELL DOES THINGS

EVEN before Margaret Holt had left The Refuge with the eccentric author Jack Howell began to realise the gravity of this new danger there might be for his protégée in the close association with a man of such crime-detecting propensities as Clavering. The slightest betrayal of her secret would not be lost on that fathoming, ferreting brain. The hunted girl plainly feared the position into which his own hasty judgment had thrust her, and the ordeal would be all the more trying on that account.

"I was a fool!" he exclaimed to Mark Wilson. "I believe this head piece of mine is turning into solid ebony. I'm going to bring her back," he added and started impulsively towards the door.

The old man caught him by the arm: "I wouldn't do that; it will only lead to explanations that might arouse Clavering's suspicions," he counselled.

Howell thought a moment. "Right you are," he agreed. "We've got to chance it now; but somehow I wish I hadn't let her go! Well!" he said later, looking at his watch as he moved towards the door, "I'm going after that chap Rivers I told you about. I must get him to the church with the list those Scarlet Banders have their pipes laid out for. Come to my office in the morning and I'll let you know if I've got a line on anything. We've just got to put this thing over ourselves. The 'band' will watch the police like cats."

Together they left The Refuge, parting at the subway entrance, Mark Wilson to return to his home and the reporter to begin his search for the agent to whom he planned to entrust the delivery of the sealed package at St. Anne's Church. As he hurried along, he had time thoughtfully to review the

exciting incidents of the last two hours. He quite realised that in aiding this girl he was assisting a fugitive from justice, but he had taken up her cause and he meant to see it to the finish, even if it landed him in jail. From now on her battle was his; she had trusted him and he would make good for her, no matter at what cost to himself. He had been looking for some excitement. "Well, I've got it good and plenty now and with a little extra thrown in," he thought with a wry smile.

Margaret's strained, impassioned face haunted him all the way. As he went over again in his mind her story that she had so falteringly told him, compassionate tears came to his eyes, and the longing was strong to take her in his arms and defend her against all the world if need be. Then he shook himself. "Great Scott!" he thought. "Am I getting sentimental? Wake up, old man! Wake up!"

He began his search for Andy Rivers.

In the midst of it an idea flashed upon

him as with a blinding light. He stood still where he was, clutching at the precious package in his breast pocket.

"Why didn't I think of that before?" he muttered.

"Dixon! He's the man for us in this crisis. Well, of course!"

Accordingly one Kenelm C. Dixon, M.D., specialist in radiography, received an impetuous call from one Jack Howell before the half of a good hour had passed away that same day. He knew Jack and chaffed him now over his very visible excitement.

"What's the matter?" he inquired. "Want an X-ray of your wish-bone?"

"Cut out the comedy," retorted Jack, pulling the mysterious sealed package from his pocket. "This is too serious. Here's the idea. For certain reasons, which shall be nameless, this seal cannot be broken. Now what I want to know is, is it possible to take an X-ray of what is written on this card inside? Do you get me?"

Dixon took the envelope from Jack's hand and examined it closely.

"Yes," he answered carefully, "it might be done if it is written in lead pencil or if there is any mineral matter in the ink fluid."

"Then go to it!" commanded Howell, helping himself to one of Dixon's cigars and beginning to puff nervously at it as he eagerly watched the specialist arrange the apparatus for the experiment that meant so much to him. "Better take four or five negatives to make sure," he suggested: "I don't want to take a chance at a fizzle."

Dixon made four exposures of the package, while the reporter watched his every movement with intense absorption. "When can I have the prints?" asked Jack.

"Some time to-morrow," replied Dixon. "Where shall I send them?"

"Don't send them anywhere. I'll call for them myself; and don't show them to a living soul," cautioned Howell.

He had but little time now before ten o'clock, when the important missive must be placed in the pew in St. Anne's Church. He rushed off again in search of Andy Rivers, found him in a saloon, dragged him out, deposited him in a taxi, and proceeded in the seclusion of the closed cab to unfold his project to the bibulous ex-reporter in less time than it takes to say so.

"Do you want to make five dollars?" demanded Jack. "Real money?"

"Sure I do!" answered the other.

"Then listen," Howell went on. "Do you know where St. Anne's church is?"

"Down town in the Italian Quarter. I know it."

"Good," ejaculated Howell. "Then you won't waste any time finding it." He took the package from his pocket as he continued. "Now get this! This cab is to take us down somewhere in the vicinity of the church. You are to enter the church, go to the last pew on the right hand side, and place this package in the book that you will find there.

Do you understand? In the last pew on the right-hand side."

"Say, what is it? Dynamite?" queried Rivers, eyeing the mysterious package with a slight show of nervousness.

"Nix! Nothing like it. All you have to do is to place it in that book, then walk out of the church and make a get-a-way as though you were scared to death."

"Well, if that package contains nitroglycerine you bet I can look the scare all right. When do I get the five?"

"As soon as we reach the church."

"You're on," chuckled Rivers. He thrust out his hand for the package quite keenly.

"Fine," ejaculated Jack as he handed it to him. "Now tell the driver how to get to that church. Tell him to get a hustle on. We've no time to lose if we're going to put this over right. See?"

Rivers did as Jack directed, and the cab moved off in the direction of St. Anne's. Neither man spoke again, Howell absorbed

in formulating his plans for future action, the other anticipating the night he would put in with the promised five. Jack heard a neighboring clock tower strike nine. There was still an hour before the time set.

A block away from the church they left the cab, and Jack, instructing his companion to wait ten minutes before entering, left him and made his own way to the chapel door and knocked for admittance on it.

The door was opened by a vergier who scrutinised the reporter carefully. Jack explained that he had been sent by the electric light company to make an estimate for installing power in the organ loft, at the same time presenting the card of an agent of the company who had wanted to wire his mother's house in Jersey. Satisfied with his credentials, the vergier admitted him and piloted him to the loft, where he left him with pad and pencil in his hand ostensibly busy with measures and figures.

Left alone, the reporter glanced down into the dimly lighted church. The pews

were vacant, save one on the left side, near the door, in which he could discern the bent form of a veiled woman deeply engaged in her devotions. Moving back into a shadow he had a position from which he could command a view of the church completely, remaining himself unseen. He glanced nervously at his watch: the time was nearly up. He began to get uneasy; he wished he had not given Rivers the money so soon: the temptation of a drink at a near-by saloon might be too strong for him—the whole project might miscarry. But his anxiety was relieved in a moment, when he saw Rivers enter the church as they had duly arranged, and make his way to the last seat on the right-hand side. At the same time Jack saw the woman on the opposite side slowly turn her head in the new-comer's direction.

"H'm," he muttered. "That's it, eh?"

Rivers lost no time in the execution of his mission, and in another moment hurriedly left the church. Eagerly Howell watched the woman to see what move she would now

make. For some minutes her head remained bowed. Then rising, she glanced cautiously all about the edifice, and walked slowly over to the seat in which Rivers had been seated and knelt again there devoutly.

The reporter felt his heart beating like a trip-hammer. What should he do? To descend out of the loft now might arouse suspicion; he might be detained by the verger's questions. He decided to take the chance, the woman's movements were so deliberate that she probably would not leave in a hurry. He reached the front of the church without being waylaid at all and lost himself in the shadow of a doorway by the holy water font. He had not long to wait before the veiled woman appeared and passed through the vestibule.

He followed her at a safe distance until she reached a house on Fourth Street, which after a hasty look up and down the street, she entered hurriedly. Jack stopped only long enough to make sure of the number, that he might easily find it again, then re-

traced his steps to the church and made a careful examination of the prayer book in the last pew on the right-hand side. The package was gone! His heart beat wild with hope, for he knew that he had touched a living clue.

The next morning after his eventful pilgrimage to St. Anne's, Howell was touring up and down Fourth Street in a curtained taxi, and looked long at the house into which the devout, veiled woman had disappeared the night before. It was like all the others in the block except for its closed shutters. There were bars at the attic windows, but so were there old-fashioned bars at many other windows in the street. "They must use the top floors in this neighbourhood for babies and lunatics," thought Jack.

Just across the street, directly opposite the house of mystery, a sign "Rooms to Rent" in a second story window attracted his attention. "That's the gag!" he said to himself excitedly; "I couldn't beat that if I cheated! Driver, back to Broadway!"

That night Mark Wilson called at the house that had the room for rent; explained to the slatternly woman who came to the door that he was looking for a room for a friend and himself; that the friend worked nights and would occupy the room during the day. A month's rent in advance satisfied the not hypercritical landlady, and the next morning Andy Rivers, whom the nimble-minded Howell had attached to his hastily mustered secret-service bureau by means of the promise of a fat weekly stipend, took possession of it. From that time on Mark Wilson by night and Rivers by day kept watch of the house on Fourth Street, each man reporting duly to Howell when he went off duty.

Meanwhile the self-appointed sleuth was cautiously and vigilantly watching developments and keeping his own counsel. Clavering's prediction as to the absurdity of thinking the Spanish woman the slayer of Morton was fulfilled, for after a short detention she was released, having established an incontestable alibi. "Didn't I tell you

so?" the author chuckled gloatingly to Howell, when he met him on the street. "The police! Huh, I'll show 'em yet."

In the meanwhile the excitement in the city over the sudden and mysterious disappearance of the Assistant District Attorney was of course intense. John McKimmell was ill from grief and anxiety. The papers were full of wild conjectures. One report had it that Holt had been murdered; another that he had been abducted; but upon one point they all agreed. The press from one end of the country to the other burst forth in caustic editorials condemning the laxity that made such an outrage possible. The thinking public was horrified at the probable fate that had overtaken its idolised official, and though the police were in earnest co-operation with the District Attorney, day after day passed by and no trace of the missing man could be found.

Jack Howell kept silent and waited. He was not actuated now by any selfish desire to land a scoop and make his lasting rep-

utation. His heart and mind were set upon rescuing Holt from the clutches of the gang that held him prisoner; the game was deeper than he had thought, but he had taken a hand in it and would keep on now without any thought of danger or reward. He must work alone. The slightest suspicion abroad of what he knew meant everything inimical to his plans. The Scarlet Band was watching, spying, waiting, with a knife at its captive's heart, ready at a word to close his lips forever. The sentence in the letter: "Your brother is safe as long as nothing is known," Howell felt, justified his caution.

Three days passed after his meeting with Margaret at The Refuge, before he made an attempt to see her again. He feared the wily old Clavering more than any one else, however, and he must see if everything was all right in that quarter. Late one afternoon a leisurely stroll in the vicinity of the novelist's house was rewarded by the sight of the owner of it just starting out on his evening walk. The reporter waited until

Clavering had shambled off round the corner, then he boldly approached the house and rang the bell. The coloured housekeeper at first stoutly refused to admit him, but when, with an ingratiating smile, he pressed a bill into her smoky palm, she grew more tractable.

"I got 'splicit instructions," she informed him grandiloquently, "not to 'low anybody in hyere. But I reckon if you'se come to see dat new type-writer I can just keep m'self in ignorance of it. Yars, Sir!"

After this he had made several calls on Margaret, but they were brief, as there was always the fear of Clavering's return from his ten minutes' exercise. The girl was very brave; Howell knew that the look of fear in her eyes came from worrying about her brother as much as for herself. When he expressed anxiety lest the strain should be too much for her, she comforted him with the assurance that he could not have found a better place for her. No one ever came to the house. No one was ever allowed to

enter the study but the faithful Martha. She, Margaret, might be living in a distant planet, so secluded was she from the world of men and events. She acknowledged that the work was hard and the hours long: sometimes Clavering would rouse her from sleep even in the middle of the night to take his dictation if the inspiration seized him; but he was not unkind, he seemed to like her work, and even praised her for her speed and accuracy.

She listened with breathless interest to every word Jack had to tell her of the progress of his search for Victor. She tried to find words in which to thank him, but her gratitude was inexpressible: the thing was beyond words now for both of them.

Jack wanted no thanks from her. It seemed to him only right and natural that he should protect and shield her. He had made no women friends since he had come to New York. He met a few merry, attractive girls, now and then, and felt the impulse to be friendly with them, but his work had en-

grossed him more than women. Because of it, his way had led more in the misery and pitfalls of certain phases of city life and at too close range to be attracted by mere froth and glitter. And yet he had never felt the necessity of rolling in the gutter to make sure there was one, though it was an idea that had obsessed a-plenty of his colleagues. As man and boy he had lived cleanly, enthusiastically, with high courage for himself and always a helping hand for others.

But now this interest in Margaret Holt had won complete possession of him. Was it just sympathy that made this tugging at his heartstrings? Or—he laughed as he asked himself the question—had he fallen in love with the girl? “Great Scott! I believe I am really getting dippy!” he told himself. “Go easy, Jack!”

A week passed and still the faithful henchmen of Fourth Street could report nothing. Impatient to do something, to make some move, Jack tried to justify himself, mean-

while, for his enforced inaction. "Why worry?" he kept asking himself. "No one knows where she is. Why worry?"

But only the next day something happened that made the little devils of fear and apprehension descend upon him again with a rush. He was reading the *Evening Telescope*, and was startled to see already the first instalment of Clavering's new serial entitled "The Morton Mystery."

Jack's heart hammered in his throat. "Jupiter!" he exclaimed. "He's at it already." Eagerly he skimmed the sensational paragraphs of this hectic brain. Yes, here was Clavering's familiar method—the circumstances, even the proper names transferred from the news columns into the chapters of his perfervid fiction. The heroine of the story was a young girl named Mary Hadfield, who had sought and found employment with a glass merchant named Morton. The concluding words of the chapter made Howell turn white about the lips.

When her employer had left the room, with the crouching, stealthy step of a panther this beautiful young girl went to his desk where she made a hasty search through his papers. But alas! Her search was fruitless. She reeled from the shock of disappointment. She clutched at the collar of her dress. "I must find it! I must!" she gasped. Then in the hall she heard the sound of his returning footsteps. With the quickness of a cat she resumed her work at the type-writer, and greeted her employer upon his entrance with a lovely smile, little dreaming that behind the glitter of those hard, cold eyes the serpent of suspicion was beginning to uncoil and raise its hissing head.

Howell sat spell-bound. What mysterious power directed the novelist's brain? How much nearer to the truth would it lead him now? He thought of poor Margaret taking this story down from Clavering's dictation, and had fear for her. Would she betray herself? She had been in perilous places before and had emerged triumphant, but would she endure this last ordeal?

Another week went by and Howell now

raged furiously with impatience. "Have you nothing at all to tell me yet, Andy?" he demanded, when Rivers came to make his usual report.

The ex-reporter gave a discouraged shake of his head.

"Nothing doing!" he said gruffly. "I wouldn't stay in that blasted hole another minute if it wasn't for the pigeons."

"Pigeons?" demanded Jack. "What pigeons?"

"Well, you see it's just this way," said Andy. "I've watched that house now for nearly two weeks, till my nerves are so shaky that I want to yell if any one looks up at my window, and not a living soul have I seen, man, woman or child, stir in or out of that house yet."

"Yes, yes, yes, but what about the pigeons?"

"Well, I've noticed that for the last three days now a flock of pigeons have lighted on the ledge in front of that barred attic window and have been picking up things as

though they were eating. That may be a tip for us!"

"I don't quite get you," said Jack.

"Some one is feeding those birds there or they wouldn't come so regularly. From where I am I can't get the right angle on that window to see really just what is happening."

Howell gave a whoop of joy and seized Andy by the shoulders. "Have you tried the roof?"

"Not yet. You see I didn't get wise to the pigeon gag until to-day."

Howell was fairly shaking with excitement. "Look here, Andy, you shift with Mr. Wilson to-morrow; let him take your place."

"All right!" agreed Rivers cheerfully, who felt like welcoming any change in the monotony of his employment. "But get this," he added. "No more Stealthy Steve in mine after this job. See? Good night!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE OTHER STORY

THE queer old clock on Winthrop Clavering's mantel struck the half hour.

"Half-past four," growled the novelist, "and I've been at it since five this morning; and this chapter is not finished yet. I tell you it must be done to-night. What's the last I gave you?"

He looked impatiently at Margaret Holt, who for the twelve hours had been recording a narrative so like her own experiences that it seemed to her the curious old man there must actually have some occult power of divination; she felt as if he were plucking threads from her inmost mind out of which to weave his terrible story. But she whipped her tired brain to obedience again.

"Read it! Can't you? Read it!" went on Clavering querulously.

She hesitated a moment over her short-hand notes, and then read:

"The time had come to fulfil her desperate mission. It was now or never!"

"No, no! that won't do! Cross it out! What's the matter with my brain this afternoon?" The author actually whined as he paced the floor, trying by physical exertion to stir the sluggard imp of his inspiration.

"You have been working a long time," suggested Margaret, inwardly praying for some cessation of her nerve-racking work.

"Only twelve hours. My God! Have I the brain of a jelly fish?"

Back and forth, back and forth he raged, but still the thoughts refused to flow. "H'm," he growled, "I'll go take my walk now instead of later."

He doffed his black skull cap, changed his shiny, dressing jacket for a shinier coat, struggled into his cape-coat, and jamming the big felt hat down over his eyes stamped out of the room and down the stairs. The

exhausted amanuensis gave a great sigh of relief as she heard the peg, peg of his stout walking stick die away. Now at least she could have a little air and rest.

She turned out the light, then went to the windows and threw them open wide, leaning against the casement and looking out upon the lighted street. Mentally and physically weary, too weary even to fear, she told herself, for ten days she had endured an agony of mind that was beginning now to produce a sense of numbness in her brain. It was her story that Clavering was writing—hers. The incidents he used were never identically like the facts, yet they came so near the truth that sometimes it took all her power to crush back the sob of terror that forced itself to her lips.

How much longer could she hold out, she wondered dully. Not only the mental strain was telling on her, but the confinement, too, the long hours of work in the smoke-fogged room, were sapping her vitality.

From sheer weakness she slipped down

on the floor, and rested there by the window, leaning her head against its sill. The night air blowing in cooled her feverish eyes and head. She never dared approach the window in the day time lest some one in the street might see and recognise her. When old Martha, the housekeeper, entered the room a few minutes later she found her there still asleep.

"Po' chile!" she muttered. "Fas' asleep. Dat ole debble gwine to kill her wif work." Martha liked the new stenographer better than any of the others that had so far had the ill fortune to work for Clavering. "You's de bes' of de ladies dat has had dis job yet," she continued, looking at the sleeping girl. "Yo' ain't got none ob dose high heel notions like dem."

Placing a tray of food upon the table, she went and closed the windows, for the air had grown chill. The sound roused Margaret with a start; the room was so dark she thought she must have slept far into the night. Then she saw the kind face of the

coloured woman bending over her, and knew again where she was.

"What time is it, Martha? It's you, is it?" she sighed.

"Going on to five o'clock in de ebening, Missy."

"I must have fallen asleep," said Margaret.

"And a blessed good thing, too," replied Martha sympathetically. "You don't get enuff sleep, Honey."

"No, I don't sleep very much; that's true. Has Mr. Clavering returned yet?"

"No," said Martha. "Not yet. I heered de door close after dat old crime-eater, 'bout twenty minutes ago, an' I just slipped up hyer wid someting t' eat fo' yo'! Yo' wasn't down to lunch to-day." Martha volubly disapproved if there were any irregularities at meal-time.

Margaret shook her head. "We've been at it all day," she said.

"It's a crime!" expostulated the old housekeeper. "A sin! Start work 'fore

sun up an' keep a diggin' till five o'clock in de ebening. Yo' ought t' jine de union an' stick fo' eight hours."

"Mr. Clavering has to write when the spirit moves him, you know," said Margaret.

"Huh," grunted the disgusted Martha. "De spirit ought t' mobe him a long way off, I say."

She placed a chair before the tray.

"Come now, Honey, jes' yo' take a bite," she urged. "There ain't nuthin' passed yo' lips since seven o'clock dis mawnin'. I know dat."

Margaret seated herself and made an attempt at eating.

There was but a dim light in the room and the hands in the prints that lined the walls seemed weirdly stretching out their fingers to grasp hers. The girl shuddered. "Turn on all the lights, please, Martha, and draw the shades," she cried.

"I s'pose he's workin' on dat new story dat's runnin' in de *Ebenin' Telescope*," inquired Martha as she obeyed.

"Yes, yes, it is the new story," assented Margaret with a nervous shudder.

"'Bout dat Morton murder, ain't it?"

"Yes, I believe he is founding it on the Morton murder," said Margaret, tremulously.

"Massa Claverin' kin certainly write about murders," commented Martha. "He used to make me listen t' his stories till I got so doff gonéd nervous dat I use t' jump at de sound ob my own breath." The old darky shuddered elaborately as she bent to pick up some of the many papers scattered about her master's desk.

Margaret had been trying to eat her toast in vain. "Martha, please take the tray away. I can't eat," she said pleadingly.

The coloured woman looked at her pale face anxiously. "Why don't yo' run out an' take a little walk, Honey? Yo' ain't been outside this house since yo' come hyer, more'n two weeks ago," she said kindly.

"No, no, I can't go out. They might—" Margaret stopped quickly, then added:

"I must be here, ready to take Mr. Clavering's dictation when the mood takes him, you know."

"De roses is fading in yo' cheeks, Honey," warned Martha. "An' de fus' ting you know yo'll get a sickness. I don't wonder yo' ain't got no affection fo' food wid dat ole smoke stack a-puffin' all day long." She picked up Clavering's blackened pipe from the floor and with a wry face deposited it on the mantel. "De smell ob dat old pipe would put shame in a skunk. He ain't got no cause to be so untidy, if he is a story-writer. Ashes all over everything. I do nothin' but sweep up pipe ashes all day long. Huh! I jes' wish dey was dat ole debble's ashes! Any idea how dat story's comin' out? S'pose he knows himself?" she branched off.

"Sometimes I think he does," said Margaret.

"My gran' chile's been readin' de chapters t' me as dey come out in de *Telescope*," began Martha again; "powerful bright chile

dat Mose. Las' time de young beautiful lady was workin fo' de villun, an' he'd begun t' s'picion her." Her eyes grew white as she proceeded. "Den de villun, he laid a trap to cotch her, an' den, jes as we got all fussed up fer someting t' happen, Massa Claverin' he say 'T' be continued in our nex'!" Jes' as I got my breath already fer a big gulp—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Margaret. "It is very exciting, isn't it? But don't let me keep you from your work."

"Oh, I ain't so crazy 'bout work dat I can't hab a few lingerin' moments' talk. I s'pose dere's a murder in de nex' chapter?" she persisted.

"I don't know," Margaret answered shortly.

"Well, some one's got t' get killed in de nex' chapter, or dere'll be a heap ob disappointin'," complained this unwilling though garrulous consumer of the Clavering classics.

Her eyes lighted on the tray, still full of food. "Why, chile, yo' ain't tasted a thing.

Fust yo' know yo' stummick will jes' go ker-flummick. Why don't yo' get dat young man who's buzzin' roun' tryin' to bust in hyere t' take yo' fo' a ride in one ob dem chukerty cabs, h'm?"

An imperative ring at the bell interrupted the flow of words. "Now who can dat be?" speculated Martha.

The sound and the old negress's last words had sent a touch of colour to Margaret's pale face. Perhaps it was Howell again with some news of Victor. Howell had been the only person to ring that bell since she had come to this queer house. Again came a peel that echoed through the hall.

"Hurry!" she called to Martha.

The negress gathered up the tray. "If it's dat young man ob yours I certainly am goin' t' 'fuse t' mission him. If dat ole debble eber finds out I let him in before dere'll be anudder murder to write a story about, an' dis chile'll be de mangled corpse."

She went out, and Margaret listened and heard her open the front door. Howell's

eager voice rose to her as he parleyed with the obdurate housekeeper. "No, yo' can't come in hyer agin," Martha was protesting. "Massa Clavering done tole ma neber to let no one in while he's inspiring."

"Is that so, Sappho? Well, take this and buy yourself a limousine."

Next moment Martha's voice rose again in a pretended grumble.

"Well, you come in, but," she added with a chuckle, "remember you bust right in ober my dead body."

And indeed Howell was up the stairs in a bound and grasped Margaret's outstretched hands in the study while the old mammy was still expostulating.

As the door closed behind them, Jack could see that the poor girl was shivering so that she could hardly stand. "My dear child," he sai danxiously, "what is it?" and put his arms about her.

She felt his tender, protecting touch and an overwhelming flood of feeling swept over her. Her breath came hurriedly, and with

a little sobbing cry she leaned her head against his shoulder, her body shaken by a perfect paroxysm of sobs. At first Jack made no effort to quiet her, thinking that the storm of emotion at last would ease the strain; just once he bent and touched her hair with his lips very tenderly.

When her sobs grew fainter he began to talk to her. He was very gentle, but she felt his strength lifting her with every cheery word. "Come now, Margaret," he said. "Steady, now. You're not going to give out now, you know."

"Oh, Mr. Howell," she pleaded, "I can't go on. I can't go on."

Howell turned to her quickly, "Can't go on?" he asked. "Why? What has happened?"

"Oh, everything! That awful old man! He's so dreadful!"

"Clavering!" he cried, his hands clenched. "Has he insulted you?"

"Oh, no, no; not that. It's this story that he is writing. My own story. He is un-

canny, terrifying. He has brought it up now to the very day of the murder, and nearly everything that he says is true. I don't know how he knows! To-night he will begin the chapter of the murder. How can I sit there calmly and take down his dictation? I shall betray myself! I tell you it is driving me mad!" A terrified excitement lighted her strained face and her great eyes burned feverishly.

Howell took her two hands in his and spoke again, almost sternly. "Steady now, Margaret! It may not last much longer. I have some news for you."

His voice and the import of his words quieted her at once. "Some word from Victor?" she questioned tremulously.

"Not that! But I think that I may have soon," he said. Then in hurried words he told her of his discovery of the house and the pigeons. She listened breathlessly, clinging to his hand unheedingly. "Your Uncle swears that he saw your brother at the window there in Fourth Street. He believes

your brother understands from Wilson's signal that he is to get a message to us somehow."

The girl's face became transfigured with the light of this new hope. "Victor! Then he is alive! Thank God! Oh, thank God!" she cried.

"And is Uncle Mark watching the house now?" she questioned eagerly.

"You bet he is," said Jack. "He is a game old boy, Nunky. He'll spot any message that comes through, I tell you. We must not make a move until we get that message. Now, don't you worry!" he added, the tenderness creeping into his voice again.

"But meanwhile they may kill him," exclaimed Margaret.

"No, 'Your brother is safe as long as nothing is known.' That's what they wrote, you know. They have kept their word so far. But we can't take this risk with old Clavering any longer. He's the only one we have to fear now. He has boasted he'd walk into

Headquarters with 'that stenographer' yet, you know, from the beginning."

"I know! I know! He would have no mercy," Margaret cried. "None!"

"Well," said Jack, "that's hard to say about the old curmudgeon. He may have some bowels of compassion. On the other hand you may be quite right. He might take you to Headquarters with a brass band heading the procession. He might give up his own mother to satisfy his vanity. The old devil!"

"What can we do?" pleaded Margaret.

"Get you out of here," he answered promptly. "That's one thing we must do."

"Oh, thank God you think so!" cried poor Margaret.

"I have been thinking so ever since I read the first instalment of his story," went on Jack, "and now I've made up my mind definitely. We'll smuggle you off to my mother's in New Jersey. Yesterday I told her the whole story."

"You told her everything?" cried Mar-

garet. Her face, which had been pale, flooded rosy with colour. "Oh, you should not have done that. It was not safe."

"Now listen to me, Margaret," Jack said quietly. "Your story is as safe with my mother as with the sphinx. She's the best little mother in the world, too." His voice broke for a moment as he went on: "Her arms are waiting to take you in just as if you were her own little girl." He saw the tumult of emotion his words had caused and hurried on: "Mother has a little house down in Jersey which she is going to open," he explained. "She will take you there and keep you till we have your brother safe and sound in New York." He added, in a determined tone that was in itself an augury of success; "And we'll do it now, too, don't you fear."

"And then—and then—" faltered Margaret, "I suppose I shall have to stand trial for murder." She covered her face with her hands and shuddered at the thought.

Jack gave an answering exclamation of horror. "My dear child," he cried, "have you had that on your mind with all the rest? Why, don't you know you have but to tell your story to the District Attorney and you'll be hailed as the liberator of your city? Oh, my dear, you do believe me, don't you? Promise me you will not let yourself think of that again!"

"I promise," she said, smiling wanly. She held out both hands to him. "Why are you so good to me?" she asked.

"Margaret, don't you know? Can't you see?" pleaded Jack.

"See?" she echoed brokenly.

"Margaret!" He seized her by the shoulders, with a grip that hurt her. "Put that look out of your eyes," he commanded. "Do you think I'm a scoundrel? I want you for my wife, to care for you, to love and protect you as I never believed I could want anybody in this world. Margaret, don't you see?"

She looked up into his face with eyes of wondering misery. "Have you forgotten?" she whispered to him.

"Forgotten!" he repeated. His lips twisted into a strange smile. "My God! Can I ever forget? There are moments when, if I could dig my fingers into the throat of any cur that so much as laid a finger on you there is no awful, bloody, mangling thing I would not do to him."

His face was ghastly under its tan, his eyes aflame. A little cry came from Margaret's lips, and he turned away quickly, saying with a rough laugh: "Oh, I guess I'm the original cave-man all right, when it comes to avenging the woman I love."

The girl, with a pitiful attempt at lightness in her voice laid her hand on his shoulder, mimicking: "Steady, Jack! Steady now."

For reply he drew her tender fluttering hand down and held it firm in his. "Margaret, do you love me?" he demanded.

"No, Jack, no—I can't—I must—"

"Is there any one else?" he interrupted fiercely.

"No, no, no!" she denied, in a very passion of expostulation.

"Then why?" demanded Jack again. "Is it that you can't care for me, you think?"

"I must not care for you; you must not ask me," said Margaret.

"Why?"

"Jack, you know why," she went on bravely. "I put all thought of love and marriage out of my life forever four years ago."

"Margaret!" cried Jack. "Do you think—? Margaret, my poor little girl. Why your heart is as pure—" He opened his arms again, to fold her to his heart and seal the sentence.

"Oh, please, please!" she cried. "Don't! I must not let you— Besides, it is not that alone—I must go on in this work I've taken up. Other girls must be saved—Oh! don't you understand?"

"Yes, Margaret, I understand," said Jack

quietly. "But you can't go on alone. I'm with you in the work now, you know."

"Oh, and that too," cried Margaret. "You don't know how it troubles me that I've dragged you, too, into danger. I—"

"Then you do care?" put in Jack eagerly.

"No, no, I don't," she said with sobbing breath. "Not that way. I—"

Howell put one arm around her shoulders and with her pretty chin cupped in his other hand raised her face to his until he could look deep into her eyes. "Margaret, look at me," he said, in a voice of tender authority. "We'll have no false pride. We will have no evasions. Suppose you put this through, suppose we bring this gang to justice, as you and your brother and now I with you, have planned—what then?"

"Why, then," said Margaret, "we'll—"

A knock on the door and Martha's voice in a stage whisper, "It's me, Missie," interrupted her.

Howell opened the door, with ill-con-

cealed disappointment, and the old negress entered stealthily.

"Martha, Martha, what is it?" cried Margaret feverishly, before the woman had a chance to speak.

"There's a man down stairs, Honey, who says he must see yo'," said Martha.

The girl cast a terrified glance at Howell.

"But he ain't so young nor so scruntious-lookin' as this one," she added, with a chuckle and a broad wink at Jack. "Shall I let him up?"

Before the question could be answered Mark Wilson pushed by the housekeeper and entered the room, breathless from excitement and hurry.

Margaret saw him, and gave a low cry of relief and ran to him. "Oh, it's you, Uncle Mark," she sobbed, "only you."

CHAPTER XIV

TO BE CONTINUED

MARTHA blinked the whites of her old eyes sympathetically upon the situation.

"Yars, he said as how he was your uncle," she interposed; "and as I ain't got no special orders to keep out relations I just let him in. I tole him dere was a young man a buzzing roun' here, an' when he come up he'd better knock on de doh. I tole him he wouldn't find no 'Welcome' on de mat in front of it. No, suh!" She gave a meaning wink at Howell as she left the room upon this comment.

"Uncle Mark, tell us, did you get anything?" interrogated Margaret and the reporter of their new visitor.

The old man told his story breathlessly, exhausted as he was from his unusual exertion. "After you left, Howell," he began,

"I went back to the roof, you know, in Fourth Street. I watched until I saw a hand thrust through the bars of that window there, and make a motion of dropping something. Then I made my way as rapidly as possible to the street again. A lot of urchins had collected in front of the empty house, and were looking at something in the hand of one of them. They talked and kept looking upward, as though what they'd found had dropped from the sky. 'What you got there, boys?' I said, as I walked up to them, and I tried to laugh. 'Gee, I guess it's a riddle. It's got my goat,' said one of them as with a shake of his head he held out a linen rag which I could see had writing on it. I tell you my heart was beating when I took the thing from that boy's hand. 'I guess some one's been kidding you boys,' I said and walked carelessly off, the thing still in my hand, as calmly as I could. Once I turned the corner I jumped into a taxi and here I am."

Margaret seized the piece of cloth her

uncle held out to her and studied it intently.

"It is a message! It is, it is!" she cried exultantly, and hurried from the room. In a moment she was back again with a small note-book in her hand—a cipher. She spread the rag out on the table and seated herself, Howell looking over her shoulder, his brow wrinkling in perplexity at the blurred scrawl she held before her.

"Fire—escape—quintus—blue—coats—cord from old rug—ground work—dusk."

"What is it?" he demanded. "Can you make it out?"

"It is in our private cipher," Margaret explained. She turned the leaves of the book in her hand rapidly and went on with her code.

"Immense!" ejaculated Howell. "Sorry, Mr. Wilson," he went on, turning to the elder man, "but I'll have to ask you to get back to that house just as quick as your legs will take you. And don't leave it for a minute if you have to bring it with you. Don't take your eyes from it."

"I know," said Wilson. "I'll go. Will you be there soon?"

"Yes, just as soon as we dig out this cipher. Hurry!" In his excitement he almost pushed Mark Wilson from the room.

"Can you make it out?" he asked as he joined Margaret at the table.

"Yes. The first word, 'fire-escape,' means 'Am closely guarded!'"

"Good! Good! Now quintus."

"Quintus, quintus—" she repeated. "Yes, here it is—fifth floor."

Howell put the words together. "Am closely guarded: 'Fifth floor.' Bully! We're getting it! Now 'blue coat!'"

"Blue coat—blue coats," she murmured as she turned the pages; "I have it; it means, 'Don't bring police.'"

"Well, I should say not!" ejaculated the reporter. "Now let me see, what's the next: 'Cord from old rug.'"

For a few seconds the girl searched, then shook her head in puzzled disappointment. "There is no key to that here," she said.

But after a moment's thought, she added, "Oh, yes, that must be it! He has made a *cord* from an old rug!"

Howell jumped to his feet as he caught the significance of the words. "You have it! That's it!" he cried. "He's going to *communicate* with us by means of that cord! The rest! Now quick! quick! 'Ground work at dusk.' What does that mean?"

A moment's hasty, trembling search, then Margaret read: "Will lower. Will lower?" She looked at the reporter questioningly.

"Don't you get it? Don't you see?" cried Jack. "He will lower that cord at dusk." His eyes were blazing and his face grew crimson with excitement. "Am I a sleuth! Are we sleuths, you and I?" he almost shouted. Then he pointed to the window. "Look, it is long after dusk now. Perhaps the cord is there already. I'll get a return message up to him if I have to climb up the cord with it myself."

"But you'll be careful," cautioned Margaret, "won't you? Remember there's danger?"

"Oh, hell with danger! Oh, my dear, I beg your pardon," he added contritely.

Snatching a piece of paper he hastily scribbled, reading aloud as he wrote: "Friends are watching. How strongly guarded? Strike match at window when ready to return answer."

He folded the paper and put it in his pocket, then turned to Margaret again. "There! He'll be wise to that. Now keep your nerve, little girl, until to-night. Remember, I'm with you." He caught her hands in his and laid his lips on them, unrebuffed. "Margaret, you are not to forget what I said to you," he commanded. "Remember!"

Again the wonderful smile flashed in her eyes. "I'm only afraid it's you that may want me to forget," she said.

He held her hands as in a vise, and his face

was grim with determination as he answered, huskily: "You must believe me, whatever happens—I—"

The slamming of the front door and the peg-peg of a walking stick in the hall froze the words on his lips. "Is that Clavering?" he asked Margaret, hurriedly, as he saw her face turn white and her eyes grow large with apprehension.

"Yes! Yes! That awful man. I'm terrified at the very sound of his feet," she breathed.

"Courage!" Jack whispered to her. "You must not give way now. Remember what it means. Remember that we are working to save Victor, and that he will get a message to us to-night."

At his words her faltering spirit rallied. "I'll try, oh, I'll try," she whispered back; "I will do my very best."

An angry roar at the door made them both turn suddenly.

"I thought you told me you didn't have a feller!" yelled Clavering, looking at Mar-

garet vindictively, furious at this invasion of his sanctum sanctorum. He directed an annihilating glance at Howell too, who was making desperate attempts to meet the situation with placid unconcern so far as Margaret was concerned.

"Now get into your reverse, and back up, Little Nemo," he taunted, trying to draw the novelist's fire upon himself.

"Don't call me Little Nemo!" Clavering roared, shaking his cane at Howell threateningly. "What business have you here in my house, anyway, I should like to know? I told that black devil never to allow any one up here. Any one! Get out! And you," he added, turning to the trembling girl, "You get to work! No feller, indeed!"

With a final outburst he shambled off into his bedroom to change his coat.

Howell hurriedly approached Margaret again. "I will get you out of here some way to-night," he whispered. "Don't fear!"

"Oh, can't you take me now?" she pleaded.

"No. He must not know. He'd raise a row. What time does the old dub sleep?"

"He never sleeps," sighed Margaret.

"Could you get out about nine o'clock?" persisted Jack.

"Yes; I can and I will," replied Margaret with determination, ready to take any chance now that should free her from the strain of Clavering's dictation.

"Then meet me half way down the block at nine," said Jack. "I will be there with a taxi." He broke off abruptly and commenced whistling an airy bit from "The Pink Lady" as Clavering came back into the room.

"You here yet?" exclaimed the criminologist irascibly. "Can't you find the door? There it is. And when you leave take the stairs up with you, so you can't come back."

The reporter gave no sign of perturbation. "Now don't get excited," he cautioned. "Just wait till you hear why I called."

"I know why. To see her."

"Oh, guess again," said Jack.

"Then why?" asked Clavering. "The devil knows I didn't invite you. I wouldn't deprive him of your company," he chuckled, his little eyes twinkling malevolently. He turned to the mirror to adjust his black skull-cap.

"The Sunday Editor told me to call and ask if you can have your next chapter ready for Saturday," said Jack.

"I don't know whether I can or not," snapped Clavering. "You can tell your Sunday Editor that he'll have it when I get it good and ready, and if he sends you here again he won't get it at all. My brains are at my command. Not his," he shouted.

"Well, if your brains were at my command," retorted Jack, "I'd have them canned and put on the market as an after dinner nut. Good-night!"

With this parting shot the reporter slammed the door and departed. Margaret stifled a little sob of terror as she heard the outer door bang. He had gone and left her

alone. There was nothing that she could do. Fate held her in its net and held her fast. She heard the clock strike and her thoughts came back as from a long distance.

“Twenty-one — twenty-two — twenty-three—”

She looked in the direction of the voice. Clavering was at his hourly exercises, his wrath forgotten for the moment.

But only for a moment. “That’s a fool reporter,” he growled, as soon as he had recovered sufficient breath. “How am I going to finish my story if I am disturbed in this way?” He wheeled round on Margaret with vehemence. “He came to see you, I know. Does he think he can fool me? ME? Now if you’ve got any love affairs you keep them outside my house. Do you see?”

“Mr. Clavering—” protested Margaret indignantly.

He cut her short. “Don’t give me any argument. I got a new train of thought in my walk and that idiot has driven it out of

my head. Where's my pipe? Where in hell is my pipe?" he demanded, searching vainly on his table.

"Martha was here a little while ago; perhaps she knows," suggested Margaret.

"Oh, she never knows anything. She never did and she never will know anything," he sputtered. He went to the head of the stairs and called her. "Martha! Martha!" he yelled. "Come up here!"

Hasty shuffling foot-steps sounded on the stairs as the poor negress obeyed her master's imperative summons. "Yas, sir! I'se a comin', I'se a comin'," she panted.

"Well, stop coming and get here," he shouted back. Then in a moment he relapsed into a whining tone. "Everything to disturb me to-day. Don't do that!" he snarled at Margaret, who was sharpening her pencil.

Martha entered, puffing from the effort of her hasty ascent of two flights of stairs. "Did yo' call me, sah?" she asked.

"Call you? What did you think I was

doing? Taking vocal exercise? Where's my pipe?"

"Whar did yo' leave it, sah?"

"I don't want to know where I left it. I want to know where it is," shouted the author.

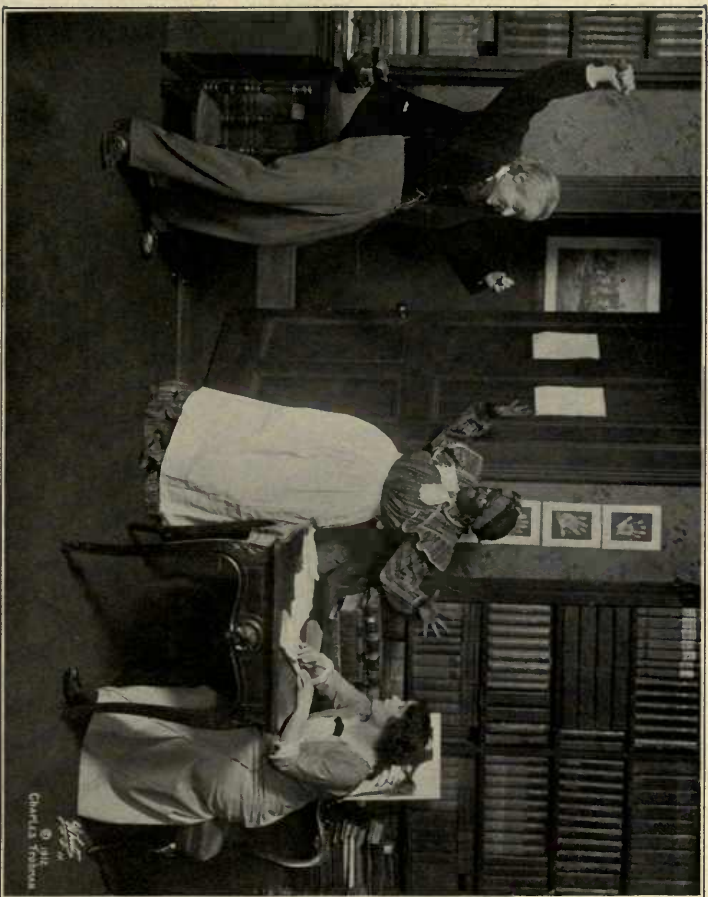
"Let me think. Whar did I see dat pipe," said Martha, scratching her head as if to stimulate remembrance.

"Stop scratching your head," commanded her employer. "If you've got such a thing as a thought, don't disturb it. Ah! Here it is," he ejaculated, finding the pipe at last on the mantel, and filling it from his tobacco jar.

"Huh!" muttered Martha, "I always find dat nasty thing on the floor. S'pose I ain't got nothing else t' do, side huntin' fo' dat. I—"

"Stop muttering," shouted Clavering. "If you've got anything to say, speak up. Do you hear? Speak up!"

"Yes, sah!" bellowed Martha. "Yes, sah!"



"HAVEN'T I TOLD YOU NEVER TO ALLOW ANY ONE IN THIS HOUSE? HAVEN'T I?"

© 1911
Charles T. Fisher

"Don't shriek at me," complained Clavering petulantly. "And why did you let that fool reporter up here? Haven't I told you never to allow any one in this house? Haven't I?"

"No, sah. Yes, sah," stammered Martha. "I tole him he couldn't come in, but he jes' busted in right by me."

"Well, if you let him in again I'll skin you alive, do you hear? Now get out!"

Martha threw one irate glance at her employer and banged the door as she left the room, adding fresh fuel to Clavering's irritation.

"Everything to annoy me to-day," he whimpered, like a great baby, as he struck another match for his pipe. "Had the finish of this chapter worked out beautifully. It all came to me in my walk, and now it's gone. Left me," he went on mournfully.

He struck his fifth and successful match at last, changed his spectacles and placed his manuscript before him. "Well, well,

let's get at it! Where were we? Read the last I gave you."

With a little silent prayer for courage to go on, Margaret began to read her notes.

"For a thrilling moment the woman stood silent, motionless. She could scarcely credit her good fortune; the golden opportunity to search for the coveted information had come. She listened. But no sound reached her waiting ears.' "

"Waiting ears," repeated Clavering. "Waiting ears. Now let's see."

He paused a moment, picturing in his mind the room at the Beaumont, no slightest detail of which had escaped his ferret-like eyes on his visit to it that memorable afternoon.

"The door to Morton's bedroom was over there," he mused aloud. "The room in which the stenographer worked there; and the desk with the telephone down there." He indicated the positions with his hand as he spoke. "That's right, isn't it?" he inquired of Margaret suddenly.

Startled she replied, "Why, how should I know?"

"Why? Good Lord! Haven't you heard me go over it times enough to know?" he inquired testily. "Oh, all you think of is getting your salary, I suppose." Then he began pacing up and down the well-worn track on the faded red carpet, repeating to himself: "Listening ears. Listening ears. What *was* that word I had? Stream? Current? Ah!"—bringing his hands together with a resounding smack—"Tide. That was it. Tide! Now it's coming back. Ready?"

"Yes, sir," said Margaret, gripping her pencil to keep it steady in her trembling fingers.

"At last the tide had turned in her favour. She was alone in the room of the man she hated with all the power of her heart. Suddenly, realising this—"

He paused, as if some word he uttered had struck a discordant note. "No! No, that won't do. Not enough distinction in that.

Change it to: 'Realising this in one blinding thought, that swept across her brain with the vividness of a flash of forked lightning, she sprang forward with quick, stealthy steps to take advantage of her opportunity.' "

Margaret's pencil slipped from her fingers. Her lips parted as if she must cry out to him to stop.

" 'Reaching the desk,' " he went on, " 'she tried to pry open the top, then began hunting feverishly among the papers, in the drawers, for the object of her search. Alas, it was not there. Like a baffled animal hunting its prey she paused. But she was not the woman to be beaten by one disappointment. She continued her desperate search. Reaching the table by the window she knelt, and ripping up the edge of the carpet, with an exultant cry, she drew forth the paper she had been working months to capture.' Got all that?"

With an air of satisfaction Clavering

paused to relight his pipe, and the girl gripped her table in a mighty effort at self control.

"Ha!" chuckled the novelist, pleased and gratified with the thrilling portrayal; "I suppose you wonder how I knew that?"

"Well," stammered Margaret, trying to conceal her terror. "It is rather—"

"Not at all," he interrupted her. "Simply observation and common sense. Just common sense. Nothing else."

Margaret gave a sigh of relief and breathed more easily. If that were all! She had feared he might be trembling on the verge of one of his curious, terrifying intuitions.

"And of course the fool police," went on Clavering, "never bothered to investigate the edges of the carpet as I did. Old grape nuts knew enough for that! And I found that a tack had been pulled up under the table by the window and the dust there had been disturbed. Only spot where it was.

H'm," he grunted. "It's an old trick! Used it in one of my own stories once; that's how I happened to look there."

"But how did you know that a paper was hidden there?" questioned Margaret nervously.

"Well, it couldn't very well have been a brick house, now, could it?" he vouchsafed. "Where were we?"

Where were they? It was unnecessary to refer to her notes, the words were fairly dancing before her eyes, burned into her brain! " 'Drew forth the paper she had been working months to secure,' " she repeated faintly.

" 'She had been working months to secure. —But even as she did so, a sound fell upon her waiting ears that sent a cold thrill of horror to her heart—*Some one was moving in the room behind her.*' Put that last sentence in italics. That's the end of that chapter. Now put 'To be continued in our next.' "

"Martha! Bring up some drinking water

and have it cold too, do you hear?" he shouted out into the hall.

"Yes, sah!" came up the response from the nether regions.

"Rather thrilling, that last chapter, I think," he remarked to Margaret, in a tone of self-gratulation. "Knew that I could make a story of that Morton murder, soon as I heard it. It's all true, too. Ha! If the police would only read my stories instead of following up senseless clues they might catch that woman easily. Might catch her myself, eh? And show 'em there's a little air left in 'that flat tire' yet." Evidently Captain Ryan's words still rankled in his soul. "Maybe I'll catch her yet, maybe I shall," he mused as he paced the floor of the study back and forth.

"Catch her! Catch her!" the words burned themselves still deeper into Margaret's brain as with shaking fingers she tried to type out the last of Clavering's chapter.

"Here's de water, sah, and de ebenin' papers," announced Martha, coming in with

a disgusted sniff at the smoke-laden atmosphere.

Clavering took the papers and settled down in his chair to search their pages.

"What's this?" he exclaimed. Excitedly he began to read aloud: " 'PLAN TO STOP CRIME WAVE IN NEW YORK * * * BOARD OF ALDERMEN OFFERS REWARD FOR DETECTION OF CRIMINALS * * * Owing to the unparalleled wave of crime that has swept over New York city, and because of the many atrocities that have gone unpunished, the Board of Aldermen this morning passed a resolution, offering a reward of five hundred dollars for information that will lead to the arrest and conviction of the perpetrator of each of the following crimes: The murder of William Cutler in Bronx Park on October thirtieth. The abduction of Willie Saphiro in Brooklyn on November first.' "

"I found out that one," commented Clavering with conviction. "He got away to Europe. I told the police how to catch him,

but they laughed at me." He glowered into space for a moment, then continued: "The blowing up of the house at 17 Grand Street on December first and the killing of twelve Italians! Huh! Black Hand stuff! - No interest in that!"

At the next item Margaret's heart stopped beating for a moment, then galloped on like a race-horse: "'Murder of James Morton at the Hotel Beaumont'"—Clavering sat bolt upright and scanned the lines again intently. "What do you think of that?" he ejaculated.

"Of what?" inquired the girl with assumed curiosity.

"Five hundred dollars offered for the arrest of that stenographer."

"What stenographer?"

"Why, the one who killed James Morton. The woman we've been writing about," Clavering explained, looking at her shrewdly.

He rose again and began to pace the floor excitedly. "Five hundred dollars! That

is a lot of money! And think of the glory of catching her too! That's worth as much as the reward in advertising alone!" His colour rose in his cheeks and his eyes glittered. "I ought to be able to catch that girl! What's my imagination worth if I can't work that out? The clue ought to come to me, just as it did in the case of Father Dominick. I literally *imagined* how that crime was committed. Pictured the murderer, too, and it all turned out very nearly as I had described it in my story."

He caught up the paper again and read: "Any one having information regarding the above, write or call on Inspector McKim, Police Headquarters, 250 Centre Street. Telephone 3000 Spring.'"

"McKim?" said Margaret; "is he—?"

"Well, well!" interrupted her tormentor unheedingly, and dropped the paper and rubbed his hands together chuckling exultantly. "I'll get her! I'll get her!" he cried. "I've got it all in my mind right up to the point of her disappearance. But

that'll come too! That'll come! I never *knew* how the Priest's assassin got away from the church undetected, but I *imagined* that he put on some of the robes he found in the vestry; and, by Jupiter, that was the very thing he really did. What do you think of that?" he demanded, pointing his long, bony finger at Margaret. "Huh! You think I know nothing about the detection of criminals, eh? Well, I'm going to show you that I do. I'm going to show you by describing in the very next chapter just how that crime was committed."

"But how can you? That would be impossible!" exclaimed the girl. In spite of the danger closing in upon her she could not but feel a curious interest in the remarkable uncanny workings of this old man's mind.

"Impossible, is it?" he muttered, ramming a fresh charge of inspiration into the bowl of his pipe. "We'll see! Now, we'll go on again. Chapter eight. THE CRIME—no, no, make it THE MURDER."

"The Murder," Margaret wrote down, and for a moment, in the stillness of the room, she thought her heart must be beating loud enough for Clavering to hear.

CHAPTER XV

THE MURDER

“THE Murder!”

Clavering tasted the words upon his lips like an epicure with an inviting dish. “Got that?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, then, now: ready.” He took his favourite pose, with one hand resting on the table, his other outstretched and holding his pipe, and began his dictation. “‘For a brief thought the woman stood motionless, transfixed with terror.’ . . . No, make it horror. . . . ‘Transfixed with horror! And then slowly, summoning her whole strength, with one supreme effort she faced about. . . . The man in whose room she thought she was alone . . . the man whom she hated and feared most in all the world, was

standing there with his back to the bedroom door, watching her, a cruel smile in his leering eyes.' ”

He paused to search for a match and Margaret gave a gasping cry. Clavering heard it, and turned quickly to see his assistant sitting with her face buried in her trembling hands.

“Why, what’s the matter?” he inquired fretfully. “You’re not sick, are you?”

Margaret forced a little laugh, desperately shaking off the sensation of faintness that threatened her. “Oh, no, no, it’s nothing. Only it was such a tense moment in the story. You made it so real that I just felt I must scream for the girl.” This time the laugh was more successfully hysterical.

For a moment a smile lighted up Clavering’s scowling face. Here was real appreciation of his genius. None of his other stenographers had ever been more than dummies; this one had imagination.

“You bet I make them real,” he chuckled, “and it’s going to be even more real pres-

ently. Now, ready." His long arm began its gesticulation. "For a tense, breathless moment the two regarded each other in silence. It was the man who spoke at last. . . . In a sneering voice he taunted her . . . telling her he had trapped her, and demanding the paper she had stolen. . . . But the woman stood her ground, defying him to do his worst. . . . Then suddenly, as the man realised the danger that the information she had in her possession might hold for some one . . . some one he wanted to save, he grasped the telephone on the desk to warn those in danger . . .'"

"No, no! It was not to warn!" cried Margaret, impelled as if by some hypnotic power to tell the truth. Too late she realised what she had done, and shrank from the anger of Clavering's face.

"How do you know? Am I writing this story, or are you?" he roared.

"I beg your pardon!" she said pleadingly. "I was so interested." Again she gave a nervous little laugh. "Do you know I find

I can hardly help working out that plot myself?"

"Oh! You want to be a novelist, do you?" he grunted. "Well, be one, and starve!" He stood for a moment trying to pick up the thread of his narrative. "What did you interrupt me for?" he snarled, helpless until his eyes fell upon the telephone on the desk.

"Oh, I have it! 'He seized the telephone on the desk to warn those in danger. "Quick," he cried, "give me the Café Rossamano!"' (The proprietor may not like that, although he ought to pay me a thousand dollars for the ad. Make it the Café Rossini.) ' "Give me the Café Rossini. Quick!" he cried. . . . The woman, determined not to be thwarted in her purpose, sprang towards the desk. . . . There, lying on the table was a stiletto. . . . As the murderous thing caught her gaze, a glittering steel-like look flashed into her grey eyes.' "

"Grey eyes!" cried Margaret. The words brought her to her feet. Was this another freak of his imagination, or was he—"How



Charles Frohman
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Charles Frohman.

"SHE HAD EYES LIKE YOURS, AND SHE WAS ABOUT YOUR HEIGHT, TOO."

did you know her eyes were grey?" she stammered.

"How did I know her eyes were grey?" He looked over his spectacles at her. "I know it by the study of inclinations. Did you think I selected the colour at random? Brown-eyed people never have self-control enough to commit desperate deeds. Nor do blue-eyed people; nor have they the quickness required in such a crisis as this. She had grey eyes," he snapped emphatically. He moved a step nearer to the girl and peered into her big, startled eyes. "Eyes just like yours," he said.

"Like mine?" she echoed, shrinking back from his piercing scrutiny.

"Yes. She had eyes like yours, and she was about your height, too," he added, as with a calculating glance he took her measure.

"Why?" she asked breathlessly. "Why do you think that?"

"She must have been about your height to strike the blow at the angle she did. Like

that!" He made as if he were striking himself above the heart, to illustrate his point.

Margaret was held as in a spell by his eyes. Magnified by the powerful lenses of his spectacles they seemed to bore into her very mind like a drill. He extended his long arm towards her. "Look here!" he exclaimed, as if struck by a sudden thought.

The girl grew rigid. What was coming? Was he going to proclaim her the murderer of James Morton then and there?

"Look here," he said again, "when this story is published in book form and the artist begins his illustrations I'm going to have you pose for him."

At this sudden drop from tragedy her face crimsoned, then went white again; and then a sudden impulse seized her to escape from his magnetic power. "Mr. Clavering," she called out, "I can't go on with your work. You will have to get another stenographer," she protested.

At her announcement, the glass of water that he was in the act of swallowing almost

strangled him. "Can't go on?" he coughed and sputtered. "What are you talking about? Why can't you go on?"

"For two days now I have had only three hours' sleep," she answered tremulously, "and I am breaking down under the strain. You will have to get some one else. I can't go on."

She turned wearily to the door, as if her departure were a thing immediate.

"Wait a minute!" he cried, catching her by the arm. "You mustn't. I can't get any one else now. I *must* finish this chapter to-night. Wait!" he begged almost piteously, as she shook her head. Then he changed his tone and tried flattery. "You're the best one I've ever had to take my dictation. You're a steady girl, always ready for work, never want to go out. Perhaps you are only nervous. You do look a little peaked, I see." He half pushed, half led her back to the table as he talked, patting her shoulder encouragingly. "Now we'll work till eight o'clock, and then I'll

send you with Martha to the moving-picture show. There, there." He placed her pencil in her nerveless fingers. He fumbled in his pocket and then, as if he were trying to soothe an unhappy child, "Have a peppermint?" he asked, and offered her a candy which he pulled out of a paper bag.

"No, I thank you," she declined mechanically.

Could she go on till eight o'clock, she wondered. She had promised Jack to try. She would try, once more. She took up her pencil, with unconquerable will. "I am ready, Mr. Clavering," she said.

"Good girl! Good girl!" he said, and patronisingly patted her arm. "Come on! Come on! We've been wasting time. We must get along with the work. What was that last I gave you?"

And Margaret's voice was steady again now as she read: "'For an instant, as the murderous thing caught her gaze, a steel-like look flashed into her grey eyes.'"

"Yes, yes! That's it!" he nodded. "'A

steel-like look flashed into her grey eyes.' ”

For a moment the novelist stood in contemplation, then as was his custom he began to work out what he called the “Mechanics” of his situation.

“Let’s see. The stiletto was lying on the table there—He was stabbed in the left side—So he must, then, have been standing with his right side to the table.” He put himself in the imaginary position, raising the telephone on his desk in his left hand, “with the ’phone like this,” he added. Then as he felt the situation grow he turned to Margaret and commanded: “Come here!”

Slowly, as if drawn to him against her will, she obeyed his summons.

“Now we’ll suppose that you are the woman, standing there,” he said excitedly, not noticing her shudder at his words. He took a long dagger-like paper knife from his desk. “Here, take that,” he commanded, and placed it in her hand.

The vision which the feel of the cold metal conjured up in her made her close her eyes

and bite her lips; nevertheless she did what she was told to do.

"Now where would you strike me?" Clavering asked her, as though he were a surgeon lecturing at a clinic.

"Where? . . . I . . ."

She raised her arm with the knife gripped in her hand, then with an exclamation of horror threw the shining thing far from her, and reeled backward almost fainting.

Clavering caught her in his arms.

"Why, what's the matter? How white you are! What ails you?" he cried out.

"It's nothing, nothing," she protested eagerly. "It's only that you are making it so real."

"Of course I make it real," he said. "That's why people read my stories. But for God's sake don't faint," he pleaded as he helped her to the table. "We can't spare the time. I like to dictate to you, you feel things so." Again he thrust the pencil between her fingers. "Come on, now," he urged, his eyes snapping with enthusi-

asm; "I'm just beginning to feel this myself."

He stopped and picked up the paper knife from the floor where it had fallen. "Now get this," he began—"With a sudden impulse she clutched the handle of the stiletto, and plunged it deep into his villainous heart! He—' "

But at this critical moment the door-bell rang persistently.

"Thank God!" Margaret ejaculated so fervently that Clavering turned upon her with an angry scowl.

"What's the matter now!" he demanded.

"The door-bell rang," she said weakly.

"Well, let it ring," he shouted. "Where were we?" He tried in vain to recover the interrupted thought. "Now you've thrown me off again," he complained peevishly. He looked at the paper knife in his hand and it spoke to him as a prompter from behind the scenes. His eyes brightened. "Now I have it," he went on. "'She plunged the knife deep into his villainous heart—' "

"Tap, tap," came from some one at the door.

"There's some one knocking," Margaret said to him.

"I don't care if there is!" bellowed the frantic author. "I don't intend to be disturbed when I'm dictating. 'Plunged it deep into—' "

"Rap, rap, rap."

"There it goes again," he almost cried.

"Shall I see who it is?" persisted the girl.

"No! Sit down. I won't be bothered," he thundered. "'Plunged it deep into his villainous heart,' " he repeated at the top of his voice, as if to drown out any other sound. The knocking at the door sounded again more loudly. "Oh, pshaw!" he groaned despairingly, dropping his arm to his sides. "How can I concentrate my thoughts with that racket going on? Tell me that, will you? How can I dictate when I'm disturbed like that? Well, who is it?" he shouted to the door.

"It's me, sah," came in Martha's voice.

Clavering gripped the knife in his hand and strode to the door. "What do you want?" he demanded. "What do you want?" he cried, flourishing the knife above her head. "You black chimpanzee! Haven't I told you never to disturb me when I am dictating? Haven't I?"

"I beg your pardon, sah!" gasped Martha with chattering teeth. "I done—"

"No, you won't beg my pardon. Don't you dare to beg my pardon," he yelled. "What is it? What do you want? Can't you talk, you screw-eyed, flat-nosed Senegambian—you—you—" He broke off with a fantastic cry, "I can't think of enough bad adjectives to use on you!"

"Well, if you find any, I hope dey choke you," Martha found breath to retort at last.

"Well, what is it?" he demanded.

"Dere's a lady down stairs, and she wants t' see you very pertickler," explained Martha.

"I don't know any ladies, and I won't see her," said Clavering.

"She wrote something on dis yere card," persisted Martha. "She said to give it to you and you'd see her sure."

Clavering snatched the card, which had a deep mourning border, from Martha's hand. "Let me see it," he said, and as he looked at it Margaret saw his shaggy eyebrows rise in an expression of keen surprise. "Is she down stairs?" he asked.

"Yes, sah," said Martha.

"I'll see her. But tell her to think of what she has to say on the way up, and say it quick when she gets here."

"Yes, sah," said the housekeeper and shuffled out and down the stairs.

More than ever with a sense of impending danger Margaret followed the old negress outside the door. She must get to her room somehow, she thought, before this other woman saw her, whoever she was. Who could she be, this mysterious person who sought an interview with one who kept himself so secluded from the outer world?

Clavering looked hard at the card he held

in his hand, snapping its edges irritably, and suddenly his eyes lighted. "A relative of the late James Morton, she's written here," he muttered.

"Where are you going?" he demanded, seeing her manoeuvre.

"Why," stammered Margaret, "I supposed of course you'd want to see her alone."

Her answer seemed to satisfy him.

"Oh, yes, of course. You get a little rest while I see her. We must finish that chapter to-night, mustn't we? I'll call you when she goes. A relative of the late James Morton. Huh! I may get some information from her about that stenographer."

CHAPTER XVI

A RELATIVE OF THE LATE JAMES MORTON

It was a very sable draped figure, the face concealed by a heavy crepe veil, that Martha conducted into Clavering's study a moment later. The housekeeper stood in open-mouthed wonder watching the woman as she glided into the room. Her curiosity was nipped short by her employer calling sharply to her: "Well, are you a relative of James Morton too?"

"No, sah, no, sah," stammered Martha. "I ain't never had no relatives like dat."

"Then get out," was the testy command.

"Yes, sah," answered Martha, closing the door as slowly as she could, to get another look at the black spectre.

Before addressing his mysterious visitor, Clavering looked her over from head to foot

with a scrutinising stare. "You want to see me?" he asked curtly. "Well, then, be quick. I've only a few minutes to spare for you."

"You are Mister Clavering?" began the woman.

"You know I am," he snapped. "There's a minute wasted asking that! You wrote on this that you were a relative of the late James Morton who was murdered at the Hotel Beaumont."

The woman took a cautious look about the room before replying, "Si, Senor."

"Senor?" Clavering raised his eyebrows. "Oh, you're a Spaniard, are you?"

"Yes. My name is Juanita Perez."

She gave another look at the doors as she inquired in an eager voice, "You speak Espagnol?"

"No, no, but you need not be afraid," he answered, noticing the nervous shifting of her head. "Raise that veil. I can't talk with any one with a lace portière over her face."

She hesitated a moment, then threw back the thick crepe.

"Ah!" ejaculated Clavering. "Yes, I can see that you are a Spaniard. And you're a relative of Morton's, are you?" He brought his hand down upon the table with a thump of satisfaction. "I said in the beginning he was a Spaniard, or an Italian; and I was right." His little eyes began to snap as he leaned forward to begin his cross-examination. "What relation was the murdered man to you?"

"He—he was my uncle."

"Oh, he was, eh? H'm," he pondered to himself, "she doesn't seem to be cock-sure of it." Then aloud, as she began to shift uneasily under his steady gaze, he went on: "Well, what did you come to see me for?" He was tapping with the paper knife upon the table impatiently.

"Because I think that you can help me," said the woman.

"Help you?" His long neck protruded

from his collar with a jerk. "Why should I help you?" he asked.

"I have been reading your clever story of the Morton Mystery as it came out in the paper—" the visitor went on.

"Nothing strange about that!" its author interrupted. "Thousands are reading it. Those who are too stingy to buy a paper are stealing it over other peoples' shoulders."

"But, Senor, you could not write this story so well unless you knew something—"

"Knew something!" he jerked out as if she had struck him. "Of course I know something. Don't I look intelligent?"

"But in your story you say so many things which are true," said Juanita Perez, with a little shiver.

"True? Of course they are true." His head shot forward close to hers. "But how do *you* know that they are true?" he demanded looking at her meaningly and intently.

She recoiled instinctively from his gaze,

then, after looking towards the door, turned to him again and asked: "Are we quite alone, *Senor*?"

"Yes, yes," he said impatiently. "Come to the point."

"Well, I—"

Again his head shot forward as he interrupted her with: "Wait a minute though." His tone was now that of an inquisitor. "If you are Morton's relative, why haven't you come forward to claim his effects, eh?"

The woman hesitated a moment and then said slowly: "Because I was arrested for being the one who—"

"O—h, I see. You are the woman who called on Morton just before the murder?"

"Si, *Senor*."

"And Ryan arrested you! Ha! Ha!" he chuckled, adding with a sneer, "The fool!"

"Yes, it was an outrage," protested the lady vehemently.

"And he called me a flat tire," muttered Clavering vindictively. "But how did you get away from him? Why did he let you

go?" he continued in his cross-examination.

"Because two cab drivers saw me leave the hotel twenty minutes before the murder."

"Ha! Ha!" he gloated. "So they found those cabbies at last, did they? I found them that very afternoon." He paused a moment as if in self-admiration, then went on: "At about what time did you call upon Morton?"

Juanita calculated a moment: "At about four o'clock."

"And you left at twenty minutes to five?"

"Si, Senor."

"While you were there did you see this woman, this Mary Hadfield, the stenographer?"

"No: Mr. Morton had told her not to come that day. So I didn't see her *then*."

"Then." Clavering caught the emphasis she put on the word. "You haven't seen her since then, have you?" he demanded eagerly. "No one saw her leave the hotel."

"No one but me—"

"You saw her, you?" Clavering started out of his chair. "By George, we are getting at the missing link in this thing." He rubbed his hands together excitedly. "You say you saw her leave the hotel? How?"

"By the fire-escape, from Mr. Morton's room."

"The fire-escape!" The World's Greatest Authority on Crime was pacing the floor enthusiastically. "By the fire-escape! That was it, eh? That was how I had it worked out in my walk, and then things drove it out of my head. I was going to end this chapter with the woman running down the fire-escape, just as the men were breaking down the door!"

Back and forth he walked in his excitement, his face glowing with inspiration, entirely unconscious for the moment of his visitor, who leaned forward watching him as though he had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

"Well, well," he demanded, after he had walked himself into some semblance of

sanity. "What then? Where were *you*?"

"In a doorway across the street, waiting for Mr. Morton to come out," said Juanita.

Clavering drew a chair close beside her. "Yes? What then? What happened?"

"I had been waiting about fifteen minutes, when I saw a window in Morton's apartment open and a woman come out and go down the fire-escape to the street."

"Could you see her face?"

"Yes, when she came under the light."

"Dark hair? Grey eyes? About so tall?" Clavering indicated by a gesture.

Surprised at the accuracy of the description, Juanita answered, "Si, Senor."

Clavering clapped his hands. "That's the woman!" he cried.

Juanita rose from her chair in astonishment. "The woman? You know her?" she exclaimed.

"Know her?" The criminologist shook his head. "No, only in my imagination," he said, his eyes gazing so fixedly into space that Juanita started and cast a quick look

behind her, expecting actually to see some one there.

"How was she dressed?" demanded Clavering, for even his fertile brain could not compass that millinery detail.

"A dark blue skirt and coat; with a white shirt waist and a red hat," she said promptly.

"Uh-huh!" went Clavering, making a mental note of the description. "Well, then, when she got to the street where did she go?"

"She crossed to where a taxi was waiting right in front of me and jumped into it, telling the chauffeur to go quick to the Café Rossamano."

"Café Rossamano!" Clavering exclaimed. "The Café that Morton was calling up when he was stabbed!" His head was now stretched forward like a hound's that sniffs a scent. "Good! Did you follow her?"

"Yes, in another cab. When she reached the café she looked about for a minute. Then a man grabbed her and tried to kiss her—Another man ran up and struck him

down—Then some friends got the man into a cab and drove off with him—She ran after the cab for a minute, but finally gave up and came back to the restaurant.”

“Where did she go then?”

“She did not seem to know where to go. She walked and walked. She would stop always before a hotel as if to go in and then turn away. I followed her to Forty-second Street and Broadway. Then I think that she saw me and knew I was following her, for she ran quickly into a subway station and jumped on a train that was just starting. I missed the train, and could see her looking back at me as it pulled out. So I lost her.”

“Did she go up town or down town?”

“Down town.”

“Uh-huh! What time was this?”

“It was nearly seven.”

“What did you do then?”

“I started for my home. The newsboys were calling out an extra about a murder at the Hotel Beaumont. I bought a paper, and then,” here the lady choked with real

emotion and pressed her black-bordered handkerchief to her eyes, "and then I learned of Mr. Morton's death."

"Did you think then that the stenographer had killed him?" queried Clavering, heartlessly breaking in upon this grief.

"Si, Senor," the lady answered with a sob; "I felt sure of it."

"Did you tell the police about her?"

Here the relative of the late James Morton forgot her sorrow for a moment, and with flashing eyes answered excitedly: "No! I would tell the police nothing."

"Why not?" Clavering demanded sharply, for the first time betraying some suspicion of the woman's cleverly acted rôle.

"We did not want them to know anything about this case."

"We? Who are 'We'?"

Something in the novelist's continued cross-examination made her answer warily: "We? Why, the relatives of Mr. Morton."

"Oh!" said Clavering, and raised his eyebrows to take a side-long glance at his vis-

itor. She was clever, and she thought she was fooling him, did she! But it was his move in the game next and he went on: "Why didn't you want the police to know? What had Morton been doing?"

The woman leaned toward him in a confiding way, and lowering her voice said softly, and with a suggestion of embarrassment: "Well, you see, Mr. Morton was a married man, and this girl—"

"The stenographer, you mean?"

"Yes. She was his—his— What you call it?" She paused as if uncertain of the word. "Ah, yes, his mistress. You see she killed him through jealousy. His wife, she knew nothing about her, and we are anxious she should not know. It would kill her, for she loved her husband very dearly."

She drew a long, sobbing breath and again had recourse to the handkerchief. The black symbol of woe was flourished considerably as she finished her recital of the scandal overshadowing the house of Morton.

"Oh! And he had been deceiving his wife

about this girl, eh?" said Clavering, with an apparent sympathetic understanding of the situation, though at the same time an incredulous smile twitched the corners of his mouth. "You're sure that's the right story, are you?" he asked. His tone implied that it was a good story but had failed to register.

"Oh, yes! I'm sure," the woman eagerly answered.

"Well," said Clavering, rising and walking leisurely across the room, "that wasn't the way I had worked it out."

"And how had you worked it out, Senor?" the woman asked.

The crafty old man took a position where he could watch his visitor's face successfully, and said musingly: "Well, you see, I was going to have Morton a member of the Scarlet Band—"

The almost imperceptible start she gave did not escape his keen eyes.

"The Scarlet Band?" she stammered.

He had known she was playing a part, but he had not expected his first shot to take such

good effect. "What is the Scarlet Band?" she hastened to inquire.

Clavering looked surprised. "Never heard of the Scarlet Band?" he asked.

She shook her head, then repeated naïvely her inquiry, "What is it?"

"Never heard of the Scarlet Band?" repeated Clavering in a tone of shocked disappointment. "Well, I am surprised! I thought everybody knew about that. That's why I have written my story about it."

"But what is it?" she persisted.

"You said you were reading my story, didn't you?"

He walked slowly towards her, gesticulating with his long, bony fingers. She shifted uneasily under his steady gaze, and commenced a nervous drumming upon the table, as he said ponderously, "It's a notorious band of cunning, conspiring criminals—"

The woman interrupted him, springing to her feet in an outburst of well-feigned indignation, exclaiming, "Mr. Morton could have had nothing to do with anything like that."

"Of course he couldn't," said Clavering, with an appeasing pat on her shoulder, "but he's going to have in my story." Then changing abruptly to an uninterested manner, he announced curtly: "Have to ask you to go now. Haven't done any work to-day. Good-bye."

He seated himself at his desk with an air of finality, and began scanning the pages of the manuscript before him.

The woman protested. "But Mr. Clavering, I have not yet told you why I called."

"Well, why did you call?" he snapped out.

"To tell you that if you find the stenographer, we—the relatives—will pay you well."

"What makes you think I can find her?" he asked indifferently. He was very busy as he transferred the mental notes he had made during the interview to the paper before him.

"Because you have hit upon so many things that are true so far. And then, besides, I have read that you have told the po-

lice how to catch hundreds of criminals in New York."

Clavering looked up with an air of gratification. "So you've heard that, have you? Well, it's true, and they call me 'Old Grape Nuts.' Well, perhaps Old Grape Nuts will show them a thing or two about this case yet," he chuckled, as he underlined the notes before him.

The woman leaned across the table and smiled persuasively. "You are so clever. Won't you help us find this Mary Hadfield? We will pay you five hundred dollars if you will."

"Oh, you will, eh? Want that girl pretty bad, don't you? What are you going to do with her when you find her?"

"We intend to take her out of the country."

"Oh, yes! Put her away where no one will ever see her again," he grinned ironically. "Very anxious to save Mr. Morton's name from scandal, aren't you? Pretty risky business, this putting people away."

"But there need be no risk," urged the woman, fearful lest Clavering decline to help her after all. "You can depend upon our silence."

Clavering twirled his pencil in his hand as if undecided. "Well—" he began.

"Yes?" she encouraged hopefully.

"If I should get any information, where could I reach you?"

She scribbled rapidly on a piece of paper and handed it to him. "You may call that telephone number."

"968 Gramercy," he read. "With whom am I to talk?"

The woman deliberated a moment. "Ask for Enrico Savelli," she said.

"Enrico Savelli," repeated Clavering, writing the name on the same slip as the telephone number. "Is he one of the mourners?" She did not see the look of grim humour twitching at the corners of his mouth.

"Yes, he is one of us," she answered.

"All right. I'll do the best I can. Good-bye!"

Juanita smiled radiantly at him as she rose to leave the room. "I am very glad to have met so wonderful a man as you, Mr. Clavering," she said. "And you will try to find the girl, won't you? Good-bye!" she smiled upon him sweetly as she closed the door behind her.

Clavering sat listening intently till he heard the hall door close below. Then he snapped his fingers contemptuously. "Pah! Relatives of Morton nothing! Scarlet Banders! That's what they are!"

He began a drumming on the table and his thoughts travelled back over the interview. What did they want with the girl? Had she been a traitor? He dismissed the scandal story at once; he knew the woman lied. Five hundred dollars' reward! He would give twice that for the glory of marching into headquarters with the assassin of James Morton! He smiled as he

pictured the consternation among the crest-fallen blue-coats when he should appear and say: "Well, here's the woman! I told you that it was the stenographer!"

From imaginary triumphs his mind came back to the notes before him. The Spanish woman had given a good description of the girl and her movements after she had left the Beaumont. He ought to find her now. With his customary method of working out situations he began to assemble his new material. "Let me see," he mused aloud; "Taxi to Café Rossamano! Forty-Second Street to Subway Station. Down town. Down town," he repeated. "Yes, she would have a better chance of eluding pursuit there." Again he read his notes. "Medium height, dark complexion, grey eyes, dark blue skirt and coat—white shirt waist and a red hat. Red hat!" he repeated. Then something registered in his brain with a click. "Where have I seen a woman with a red hat?" He never took much notice of women

in his preoccupied walks; why should a red hat be filling a pigeon hole in his memory now, he wondered.

“Jupiter!”

He sprang to his feet and began pacing the floor furiously. He saw the wearer of the red hat now! 'Twas the girl he had engaged at The Refuge for a stenographer! The one who was working for him now! Yes, she had worn a dark blue skirt and coat and a white shirt waist. His gaze wandered to the table where she had been working, and narrowed till his eyes seemed to be only points of light. Why had she wanted to quit work so abruptly? Why had she nearly collapsed when he had asked her to enact the stabbing? He sank into his chair again and sat there rigidly.

How she had tricked him! And he had thought it was his vivid writing that had moved her! “Am I an old fool?” he gasped, his anger at himself almost choking him. He half rose as if to go and summon her,

then hesitated. "I must make sure," he muttered.

With feverish haste he searched in the telephone directory for a number.

"6—4—2 Chambers," he commanded. "Hurry, you fool! Now don't give me any back talk.—Hello? Is this The Refuge? Miss Towne? This is Winthrop Clavering talking." He lowered his voice. "What can you tell me about that stenographer whom I got at your place two weeks ago? Nothing? Just came from where? Chicago? Did she complain of being ill, to you? Huh? Oh! Only exhausted and very much agitated? Thanks. That's all I want to know. Good-bye!"

He hung up the receiver and brought his hand down on the desk with a blow. It was all clear now. A woman answering the description of the one seen to leave the Beaumont by the fire-escape had gone to The Refuge exhausted and agitated, and he, he, Winthrop Clavering had brought her here

and had seen her every day and not suspected her. His eyes glittered, and his thin lips twisted in a cunning smile as he said aloud: "Well, my dear! We'll see how you can stand a little more dictation!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE TRAP

MARGARET HOLT sat at the table, and with pencil poised surveyed the dingy room. Only two hours more and she would be out of it forever, thank God! She looked at Clavering as he stood with arm outstretched ready to begin his dictation, and caught her breath sharply. Was it her imagination or was there a stealthy vigilance in the baleful gleam of the eyes he fixed on her? Who could his caller have been?

"Now start a new page. Begin Chapter nine," his voice interrupted her.

"Chapter nine? You haven't finished Chapter eight," she reminded him, darting a quick look at him, wondering what was causing him to deviate from his usual order.

"I know, we'll go back to that," he explained, taking a position near her table

where he could get a better view of her face. "Er—" a moment of deliberation—"We'll head this chapter *The Refuge*."

"*The Refuge*?" she exclaimed startled. Why that place, she wondered. She tried to throw a tinge of amused criticism in her tone, as she repeated, "*The Refuge*."

Her confusion had not escaped Clavering.

"There's a lot of atmosphere in that," he chuckled, and then added, with a fiendish grin: "And I'll manage to get a thrill in it too. All ready?"

"Yes."

The answer was so faint as to be barely audible. The girl crouched over her work as if some enemy were to spring upon her at any moment.

Without taking his eyes from her face, Clavering went on with relentless precision: "'Reaching the fire-escape, down which she fled from the scene of her crime, the assassin leaped to the pavement.'" He paused to note Margaret's trembling hand, which relaxed its hold upon her pencil, and the shud-

der that shook her body. " 'Jumping into a taxi she drove at break-neck speed to the Café Rossamano . . . ' " The girl's eyes widened and she pressed her hand hard against her heart. The man saw her and hurried on.

" 'To get with all haste her information to her waiting friend; but alas, he was not there.' " The sinister old face relaxed in a grin. She was gripping the table hard now. " 'For a moment she paused, uncertain of her next move. Where could she go? The police would soon be on her track.' " His dictation came faster now as he saw his victim swaying under its accusing weight. " 'Like a frightened animal she fled for hours. Up one street and down another. Into the Subway and out again at the next stop.' " Here he stopped and watched the girl. She was trying to recover her control, she was trying to force her pencil to respond. But he had her! He had her. It needed only one last thrust, " 'Already the newsboys were crying out "Extra! All about

the murder at the Hotel Beaumont!" She turned into a side street and suddenly, into her big grey eyes, came the light of hope. There across the street an electric sign flashed its welcome: "The Refuge." " " "

Clavering crouched like an animal about to spring upon its prey as he saw the girl's head fall forward on the table. She was at his mercy now! With a brave effort she roused herself.

"No, no, I can't go on," she cried, as she swept the papers before her to the floor. "Can't you see that I am tired and sick? This confinement is killing me. I can't go on!"

She darted for the door, but Clavering, with the agility of a cat, intercepted her and turned the key quietly in the lock.

"No you don't. You can't leave here now!"

She stood motionless, her face very white. "Can't leave here? I am not your prisoner, Mr. Clavering!"

"Yes, you are my prisoner," he said.

Margaret recoiled and he slowly advanced towards her. "Jupiter, but you're clever!" he cried. "For two weeks you've fooled me, me, the world's greatest authority on crime, and all the time I thought it was my story that was moving you."

"It was, it was. What else could it have been?" the challenging grey eyes answered back.

The long arm of the novelist darted towards her with its pointing finger: "It was the guilty conscience of an assassin that was moving you," he hissed.

"What do you mean?" the girl demanded, making a last desperate stand at denial.

Slowly, relentlessly, while he unctuously rubbed his hands, Clavering hurled his accusation at her: "You are the woman who murdered James Morton, and I'm going to give you up!" He strode to the telephone and she saw him take up the directory.

"My God!" she thought. "He is going to give me up to the police. It will mean Victor's death! He shall not do it! He



"YOU ARE THE WOMAN WHO MURDERED JAMES MORTON, AND I'M
GOING TO GIVE YOU UP!"

shall not!" The lines of her mouth tightened and a determined gleam came to her eyes. "No, you are not going to give me up!" she cried, and sprang to the table and placed her hand on the telephone.

"Who will stop me?" he snarled.

"I will!"

"You! Ha! 3100 Spring!" He had found the number.

"It is true I did it! But," she added with subtle emphasis, "you are not going to give me up until you know *why* I did it. That's not in your story, you know."

"You confess?"

"Yes! I am going to tell you everything and you are going to listen!"

He felt himself falling under the spell of her superb determination. With a snort he tried to shake it off and reached for the instrument once more. "I tell you I'm going to give you up!" he cried.

But Margaret snatched the thing out of his reach. If she could only hold him, make him listen: "No you are not, I say!"

He made a movement as if to spring upon her and wrest the telephone from her grasp; but again he felt the magnetism of her defiance. This was no ordinary criminal, this slender girl who stood there with flashing eyes and white face. Why had she killed James Morton? What had been her motive? Ah, that was where his story had been weak! He had never been sure of the motive. He would get it from her, and then, with a murmur, of whose significance he did not guess, he nodded to her, "Sit down!"

As if the tension that had buoyed her up had snapped at last, she sank weakly into a chair, and after one of those minutes of silence that seem eternities, Clavering drew his chair close to hers, peering into her eyes and saying sharply: "Now tell me the whole story."

Again Margaret told through the events that led up to her employment by Morton. For all the evidence he gave of sympathy she might have been pouring her tale into

the ear of a granite sphinx. But once he admonished her sharply, "Not so fast!" And when she came to her brother's abduction at the Rossamano, and her fear of its consequences to him, the novelist rubbed his hands in satisfaction. "So they got your brother, did they?" he gloated. "He wouldn't take my advice."

Margaret's heart sank. With a man's life at stake, would Clavering prove vindictive? And he, why should he not give up this girl, he thought. She had confessed that she had committed the murder. He had found out her motive; that was what he needed for his story. Of course there were extenuating circumstances; still she had done it. If her brother had fallen into the hands of the Scarlet Band it was his own fault. He had been warned. If he knew so much more than anybody else, let him get himself out of their clutches. If he let the girl go, what then? She was bound to be caught sooner or later, and then he would be robbed of the glory and the sat-

isfaction of confronting Ryan with her. "You couldn't catch your own feet!" The captain's taunting words came back to him. Had he not boasted that he would walk into headquarters with that stenographer? "And by Jupiter I will!" he broke out.

He crossed to the telephone. Margaret, alert for the reopening of hostilities, caught his arm. "What are you going to do?" she cried.

"I've caught you and I'm going to give you up!"

"Oh, Mr. Clavering, think, think!" She dropped on her knees beside his chair. "It is not for myself," she pleaded. "Think of my brother in the clutch of those men! You have in your hands the power to save him! Think of the good that he has done! Think of all that he and I can do in this life, if you spare us! His life means so much to every one; to the city; to the country!" she buried her face in her hands and sobbed.

But Clavering seemed deaf to her en-

treaty. "No," he snarled, "I'm going to give Ryan the laugh."

He reached for the telephone and she raised her head. In a flash she saw the name Savelli on the paper on his desk. "Savelli! Good God!"

"Spring—" Clavering began.

Frantically she placed her hand over the transmitter—"Mr. Clavering, listen! What good is it going to do you to give me up? Why not capture all those terrible men? You know where they are, you have the telephone number of their leader, Enrico Savelli, before you now!" Craftily she pictured the enterprise. "Why not capture them all? Think what a marvellous thing it would be? How it would enhance your reputation as a writer! What a wonderful climax it would make to your story, to save the Assistant District Attorney and capture the entire Scarlet Band!" She incited him, flattered him, with all the skill a terrified, desperate woman could command.

His face grew rigid, his lips parted as if

he gasped for breath. Then she saw his eyes begin to snap again and his head protrude. Had she touched the magic key that should loose the genii of his imagination? Had she?

He drew a long breath. "You're right!" he muttered. "If I rescue your brother I may catch the whole gang!"

"Don't say 'may,' say will! Of course you will," she urged.

"What would Ryan say then, eh?" he gloated. "Why, the entire police force would die of apoplexy!"

"Yes, or of chagrin!" she agreed.

"And as you say, what a finish for my story!" he ejaculated, throwing up his arms. "The description of the rescue would make a great chapter, wouldn't it?" There was something almost pathetic in the way the lonely old genius began to turn to the girl beside him for sympathy. She felt a hypocrite, but she must go on.

"Wonderful, wonderful! Think of the thrills you'd cause," she elaborated.

"But," he shook his head, "there's a chapter before that. When I had you on the rack! Ha! ha! I did have you on the rack, didn't I? That's a good heading: 'The Rack!'" He caught up a pen and made a memorandum: "Chapter ten—The Rack. Chapter Eleven—The Rescue."

"Mr. Clavering, you will save my brother, won't you?" pleaded Margaret.

"We'll see, we'll see," he cried.

He came to a sudden halt again at the sound of the doorbell. "Now who's that?" he asked petulantly.

"Oh, perhaps it's Jack!—I mean Mr. Howell," corrected Margaret. The surprised look on Clavering's face was very genuine.

"Jack! Hm! I knew you had a feller!" he said, adding, as he looked over his spectacles at her and saw the flush crimsoning her face: "Pretty fond of him, aren't you?"

"How can I help it?" she demanded passionately. "He's been so good to me."

"Huh!" grumbled Clavering. "He called me Old Grape Nuts."

"Oh, do you suppose he can possibly have some word from Victor?" she interrupted anxiously.

There came a sound of hurrying steps on the stairs and Howell burst into the room. "Margaret, Margaret," he called in a hoarse whisper that yet was almost as penetrating as a shout: "I've got it!"

In the excitement of his entrance he had not seen Clavering, but as he caught a glimpse of his scowling face and feared lest he had betrayed her secret, the change in his own was ludicrous.

Margaret saw his consternation and came to the rescue. "You may go on, Jack. Mr. Clavering knows everything now. He found me out, as I told you he would. I knew that I could not deceive him."

"Good Lord! Is the game up, then?" asked Jack.

"But he is going to help us!" Margaret exclaimed joyously.

"I haven't said that I would," growled the unfeeling novelist.

"Help us!" Howell was puzzled. How could the old sleuth who had sworn to arrest the murderer of James Morton help them, he wondered.

"Yes," Margaret continued, as though the author had not spoken. "Mr. Clavering and I have talked it all over. He sees a way to rescue Victor and capture that whole gang." She gave the bewildered Jack one long, expressive look. "He is going to have all that material for his story; don't you see what a wonderful opportunity it is for him?"

Thoroughly awakened to the situation now, Howell proceeded to co-operate too and do his share. "Why, Mr. Clavering," he exclaimed, "if you can save Victor Holt and walk into headquarters with that whole bunch of ginks in the bag, your reputation as a detective will be made! And think of the advertising there is in it! Look at the headlines in the paper!" Here the news-

paper man was in his element. "SCARLET BAND GETS THE HOOK! FAMOUS AUTHOR PUTS ONE OVER ON THE BLUE-COATS. I'll write you up myself."

Clavering's narrow chest began to expand as Howell dipped his blarney brush into colours more and more dazzling. "WINTHROP CLAVERING CORRALS NEW YORK'S NOTORIOUS BAND OF CRIMINALS. And then your picture and Margaret's and Holt's—And then—Carnegie with the medal!" He placed his hand on the lapel of Clavering's coat as if decorating him, grandiloquently. "And think what a boost it will give your novels. Why, they can't be printed fast enough."

For a moment Clavering had the vision of the dream of a life-time come true. He saw Winthrop Clavering, The World's Greatest Detective, inscribed in the Hall of Fame, saw all his failures, all his disappointments blotted out by the victorious hand of success. Then he shook himself. "Huh!" he grunted;

"changing your tune about 'Old Grape Nuts,' eh?"

Jack hastened to absolve himself. "Now Mr. Clavering, you know I didn't mean—"

"Oh, never mind that!" snapped the author. "You said something about getting a message from Holt. What have you found out?"

"I went to the house on Fourth Street, Margaret, you know," said Jack, "to look for the cord Holt was to lower from the window. I knew that I was taking big chances, but I went right after it."

"It was there?" asked Margaret, quivering with excitement.

"I kept in close to the house, till something caught on the rim of my hat. I put my hand up and felt a piece of tape. To make sure I gave it a yank. In a second I felt it tighten in my hand, and I knew that I had hold of a live wire. Then I fastened our message to it and gave another jerk and up she went."

"And he knows now that we are trying to

rescue him!" exclaimed the girl in a perfect transport of joy and relief at last.

"Huh! Huh!" said Clavering. "What did you do then?"

"Well, I knew it wouldn't do to stick around that house too long," continued Jack, "so I hustled to Mr. Wilson's, that's her Uncle Mark, you know, to his room across the street and watched for the signal we had agreed upon together. I had not waited long before I saw the flicker of a lighted match. I tell you I almost jumped from the window in my rush to get to that cord."

"He got an answer to you, did he?" broke in Clavering, now following the game with the keenest concentration.

"Yes," said Howell, and produced a slip of paper from his hat lining. It read: "Am guarded by four people. Enrico Savelli—"

Clavering reached for the address his late visitor had given him. "Huh! Good! Go on!" he said.

"Juanita Perez and a Jew, Weinberg, and another man. If you can get three of them

away, I can manage the fourth and escape."

"He says that, does he?" said Clavering. Then, after a moment's pause, he asked, "Who is the woman? This Juanita?"

"Juanita Perez? I know her. She's one of the gang," said Margaret.

"That must be the woman who followed you from the Beaumont, the Spanish woman who called here to-night," said Clavering. He favoured the girl with a look of grim humour. "Hence some of my marvellous deductions," he added. Then he sought his path on the red carpet again, his treadmill of inspiration, and paced back and forth, his head bent forward.

Margaret, with a gesture, warned Howell not to disturb his meditations. She knew they would lead him to some vital point.

"If we could get three of them away he might have a chance," the novelist muttered. "That ought to be easy! That ought to be easy!" He stopped abruptly, and Margaret knew by the flashing of his eyes that he had formed a plan.

"Do you know any of the detectives who have been working for Holt?" he demanded with a suddenness that made Howell jump.

"Sure. I know Billy Flynn, Holt's most trusted assistant," said Jack.

"How well do you know him?" asked Clavering.

"I lunch with him about once a week," replied the reporter, wondering what was coming.

"Know his telephone number?"

"Sure I do!" said Jack.

"Well, sit down there," Clavering commanded. "How far from here is the house where they've got Holt?"

"Five minutes at the outside," was Howell's calculation.

"All right! All right, then. Call up Flynn."

"What's the idea?" demanded Jack. "Put me on."

"Don't ask questions! Call him up, will you?" persisted the criminologist.

Howell went to the telephone: "3555

Spring— But what am I to say when I get him?" he demanded.

"Can't say anything till you do get him, can you?" vouchsafed the crafty Clavering.

"Hello! Three - five - five - five Spring? Billy Flynn there? It's Jack Howell, of the *Evening Telescope*. . . . All right!"

"Is he there?" asked Margaret eagerly.

"Yes, they've just gone to get him."

"Good!" said Clavering. "Now ask him how soon he can get four of his best men up here to my house," he directed further.

Howell nodded his understanding. "Here he is! Hello, that you, Billy? This is Jack Howell. Listen! I think I've got a big tip about Holt. Wait! Don't go crazy yet. It looks like a haul for some of that Scarlet Band bunch. I am at Winthrop Clavering's, the author's, 263 Waverly Place. How long would it take you to get four of your best men up here? Hold the wire." Howell turned to Clavering, who stood at his elbow with his big silver time-piece in his hand.

"He says he can get them here in fifteen minutes."

"He can, eh?" reflected Clavering for a moment. "That's too soon. Tell him to get them here in just twenty-five minutes from now. Twenty-five minutes. No sooner."

"Hello! Can you work it to get here in just twenty-five minutes from now? . . . Just a minute— He says yes."

"All right," said the author, and snapped his watch cover sharply. "Let me talk to him a moment. Hello!" he called, very suavely. "Good evening! Listen! It is just half-past eight now. Can you get your men here at exactly five minutes to nine? All right. You will find the front door unlocked. Post four men in the hall and watch the front of the house. When you are ready, throw some pebbles against the window of the second floor front. Pebbles," he reiterated, "not rocks. When you see the lights go out you rush the front room. Understand? All right! Now don't make

any blunders. Good-bye!" Then turning to Howell he directed, "You go to the house where they've got Holt."

"Surely," Jack acquiesced. Old Clavering's daring plan was beginning to unfold itself to him reassuringly.

"You watch that house. If you see two men and a woman come out of it, you get word to Holt. See?"

"I'm on the job!" said Howell. He dashed off eagerly to execute his part in the game. Again Clavering consulted his watch and moved to the telephone.

"Oh," broke in Margaret, "how can I ever thank—"

"Sh! Keep quiet!" the old man commanded. "968 Gramercy!" he called into the receiver. Margaret held her breath.

"Hello! 968 Gramercy? This is Winthrop Clavering. To whom am I speaking? Oh, you are the young woman who came to see me this afternoon? Well, I want to talk with Mr. Savelli. None of your business!" he snapped; "I want to talk with Savelli,

and hurry up.” He looked at his watch carefully. “Hello? Is this Savelli? This is Winthrop Clavering talking. Now you listen to me. If you can get here to my house in ten minutes I’ll hand that stenographer over to you.”

The girl drew a gasping breath but the pressure of Clavering’s hand on her own reassured her.

“What? How could I hand her over to you if I hadn’t found her? Here, and bring that young woman who called on me this afternoon, to identify her. And I want you to bring another man. You have got to overpower her and take her away by force. I don’t want any noise about it. She’s a very dangerous woman.” He shot a comical glance at the slender girl across the table. “What! You haven’t got another man there? Oh, I’m sorry! I shall have to turn her over to the police then. Good-bye,” he ended, but without taking his ear from the transmitter. Then followed an ironical

grin—"What? Oh, I thought you could. Hurry up! You've only got eight minutes now. I can't hold her here all night, can I? All right. Good-bye!"

"They are coming here?" cried Margaret, terrified; but Clavering did not stop to answer her. He went to the hall door instead and called: "Martha! Martha, come up here a minute!"

"Now it's all right. We'll get on," he said to Margaret. "We'll get on!" Then to Martha, "Now you listen to me."

"Yes, sah! I'se a-listening."

"In a few minutes I am expecting some callers. Two men and a woman."

"My sakes!" exclaimed Martha. "What a lot of callers yo's havin' t' day."

"Mind your own business," snapped Clavering, "and try to get carefully into that thick skull of yours what I am telling you. Now when these persons come, you show them right up here, and then you go down stairs and unlock the front door. Do you

see?" He shook his fist in the old house-keeper's face and added, "Don't you forget anything, now!"

"No, Martha," urged Margaret. "Don't forget; it means a lot to me."

"No, I won't fergit, Honey, don't yo's worry," Martha promised as she went out.

Clavering rubbed his hands gleefully. "I think I've got them. I think I've got them! If those detectives don't fool me! It would be pretty bad if they got here too soon—before those devils."

"Oh, you can depend upon Mr. Flynn," Margaret assured him.

"Well, I hope so!" he growled; then excitedly he added: "Oh, if it all comes out as I have planned, it'll be the greatest story I've ever written. Sherlock Holmes! Pah! The creation of a disordered brain!"

"But, Mr. Clavering," broke in Margaret anxiously. "What shall I do when the people come?"

"You had better go into your room and stay there, no matter what happens."

"And you will be careful, won't you?" pleaded Margaret, who knew too well how desperate were the men he was luring to the house.

He patted her hand gently. "I'll take care of myself. They won't catch the old fox napping. And when we have them, we'll start right in and finish that story, eh?"

He began to pace the floor. In his hand he held his watch, and in his eyes was the intent, feverish look of the gambler who watches for a card to fall upon the table. Margaret withdrew reluctantly to her room.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PLOT

"Two gentlemen and a lady to see you, sah!" announced Martha, just ten minutes after Clavering's telephone message to Enrico Savelli.

"Gosh!" he ejaculated. How did they get here so soon? He wondered if he should be able to delay the proceedings until the detectives were safely arrived? In some way, somehow, he must, or his plan would end in miserable failure. "Well, show them up here," he said presently.

"Yes, sah," answered Martha.

As the old negress shuffled out Clavering pushed up the window and looked anxiously up and down the street. There was no sign of any one outside.

"That's right," he muttered. "I told them not to come for twenty-five minutes."

Then he closed the window suddenly as he heard Martha returning in the hall, accompanied by other footsteps and a silken rustle that he connected with the draperies of the relative of the late James Morton. He climbed the rickety ladder to his bookshelves, and he made a show of hunting for some volume there.

"Right this way, please," said Martha, opening the door of the study.

Enrico Savelli, Juanita Perez and a fidgety little man with a huge nose whom there was no difficulty in identifying as Weinberg, entered the room quietly. Juanita had on the same elaborate mourning that she had worn upon her earlier visit. Savelli also was dressed in quiet colors, but betrayed the carefully anointed hair and twisted moustaches of a barber.

The novelist peered down upon the group from the top round of his ladder a moment. "Oh, yes; the relatives of the late Mr. Morton," he exclaimed. "Sit down. I'll be with you in a minute." He proceeded in a

very leisurely way to take a book from the shelf and began to dust it, muttering a while, but making no further move.

Weinberg began to snap his fingers impatiently, while Savelli scowled up at the unperturbed figure on the ladder; neither enjoyed the humour of the situation—that was clear.

“Just looking for a book,” explained Clavering, replacing the one he held and reaching for another. “Ah! here it is!” He opened it, looked it through from cover to cover, and then descended.

“Johnson’s Anatomy. That’s it! Have to know everything nowadays to be an author,” he explained. “Must understand what you are writing about. If one of your characters has liver complaint, you’ve got to know where the liver is; the colour of it and its size, you see.”

A grunt of impatience escaped from Savelli. Weinberg got up and sat down again.

“Excuse me, Mr. Clavering,” interposed

Juanita Perez at last, as she saw that Clavering was about to deliver an exhaustless lecture on his favourite theme. "We have only a little time, you know. This is Mr. Savelli, Mr. Clavering."

"Oh, Mr. Snivelli?" Clavering looked over his spectacles at the oily Italian, who acknowledged the introduction and resented the wrong cognomen with a curt bow. "And who is the other gentleman?"

Juanita next introduced the nervous little man with the large nose and the snapping fingers.

"Oh, Mr. Weinberg? Very glad to meet you, Mr. Weinberg." Producing the bag of sweets from which he occasionally regaled himself, he offered it to the exasperated Jew, and added: "Have a peppermint?"

"No! No!" barked Weinberg.

"You?" Clavering graciously offered it to Savelli.

"No!" said Savelli, with a disgusted growl.

"Perhaps I can tempt you?" said the host

quite unabashed, turning to Juanita; but she too was not to be placated in that way.

To consume more time, the crafty sleuth searched in the bag to find a peppermint for himself and thrust it in his mouth. The effect of the apparently innocent lozenge was extraordinary.

"Ugh!" he sputtered, "moth balls! Darn this old coat! Plague take that old Martha. Moth balls, ugh!"

But sympathy for this contretemps did not efface the very obvious appearance of impatience at the delay in the countenances of his three callers. He turned about upon another tack.

"Weinberg," he said, reflectively. "Had a character in one of my books once called Weinberg. Good Italian name, that."

The irony of this remark appeared altogether to escape his impatient visitors. With an exasperated sigh Senora Perez endeavoured to bring Clavering finally to the business they had in hand. "Mr. Claver-

ing," she began, "we have no time to waste. Mr. Savelli and Mr. Weinberg left important business to come here." The Italian confirmed this with a nod and Weinberg's nails commenced their nervous snapping again.

"Oh, they did, eh?" commented Clavering. "Well—" he apologised for his deliberation, "then we must hurry."

Savelli rose from his chair. "Yes, yes, where is she?" he demanded fiercely.

"She? Who?" Clavering asked blankly.

"The woman! The stenographer," said Savelli.

"Oh, yes, yes," said Clavering, as if at last he realised the object of their visit. "Oh, I've got her right where I can put my hand on her. Don't you forget that."

There was a simultaneous expression of surprise from each of the members of the Scarlet Band. Savelli was the first to speak: "She is not here?"

The novelist returned the Italian's glare

with a look of tolerant surprise. "Why of course not," he said. "What made you think that she was here?"

"I thought from what you said over the telephone—" A thunderous scowl began to make the evil face of Savelli look more dangerous than ever.

"I told you that I had found the woman, but you don't think that I'd keep her here, do you?" demanded Clavering. "I told you that she was a dangerous character," he added with an aggrieved look, as if the idea of using his study as a place of detention for dangerous females was preposterous on its face.

There was another hurried exchange of uneasy glances between Savelli and the woman, while Clavering strained his ears to catch some sound from the street.

"Then you must take us to her at once," asseverated the Italian, and Weinberg, renewing his Jack-in-the-box antics from his chair, chimed in: "Yes, yes, at once, do you hear?"

"Just a minute, in a minute," promised the novelist in pacifying tones. "Why, what's the matter, Mr. Weinberg? You act as if you had St. Vitus's dance. Did you ever read my story about the burglar who had St. Vitus's dance? It finally betrayed him. Where is that story?" He began searching among a pile of books on the mantel, surreptitiously looking out of the window all the time.

The exasperated trio held a mumbled conversation together.

"He is an old fool," Weinberg was saying, and looked ready to cry from vexation.

"Sh!" protested Juanita, trying to quiet her impatient companions. "Let me try him again." Then, addressing Clavering in her sweetest tones, though he seemed unmindful of her presence, she pleaded: "Come; take us to the woman, this stenographer, at once if she is not here."

"Eh?" He turned from his search among the books. "Of course," he added in a tone of abject apology, "you see I get so inter-

ested in my stories that I forget everything else. Of course. We will go now to the woman."

With sighs of relief the gangsters rose and prepared to follow Clavering. "Oh, do I need an overcoat?" he stopped and asked abruptly. "Is it cold out of doors?" He went to the window again, peered at the thermometer, then dropped his glance quickly to the street.

"No, no," assured Juanita. "It is not cold. Come!"

"All right! Fifty-five, the glass says," he demurred. "I don't want to get a cold. Colds are very bad for mental workers. They clog up the cells of the brain." He went to one of his shelves and took down a jar to show them. "Did you ever see a human brain? It's a most interesting study." He struck a professional pose, and with a wave of his long arm began: "This is the brain of a criminal. You notice the formation of the left lobe . . ."

"Ah! Bah!" broke in Savelli impatiently,

looking ready to strangle the criminologist then and there, and Juanita implored: "Mr. Clavering, Mr. Clavering, if you do not take us to the woman now—we shall not be able to wait."

"I beg your pardon," meekly replied the enthusiast on brains, taking time nevertheless to replace the specimen carefully on the shelf. "There, that's right. Now we'll go."

Again the trio started towards the door. "Here, hold on! Wait a minute!" called Clavering again.

"What is it now?" growled Savelli savagely, while the Jew fairly danced around the room in convulsions of impatience.

"Did you bring the money?"

"Yes!" the Italian snarled. "We have it here."

"Let's see it!" demanded Clavering, sitting at his table, and indicating plainly that proceedings were at a standstill until they could satisfy him on the point of their financial standing.

"You do not trust me!" glowered Savelli.

"I don't trust anybody. Let me see the money," persisted the novelist-financier.

Savelli glanced at Juanita, who nodded her head. "I will convince you," he said then, and drew from his pocket a large roll of bills and slapped them on the table before Clavering. "There are five hundred dollars," he added sarcastically. "Will you count them?"

Clavering moistened his fingers and with maddening deliberation counted bill after bill. "Is it all good? No counterfeits?" he queried, taking up a huge magnifying glass from the table, and peering through to test the validity of the greenbacks, which were evil-smelling enough to have been long in circulation.

"It is good money from the Banca Napoli e Sicilia," asserted the Italian.

"Well, I'm not sure about that one," objected the examiner, with a prolonged scrutiny of one yellow-back beneath the glass. "Maybe it's all right, though." He fin-



"IS IT ALL GOOD? NO COUNTERFEITS? HE QUERIED, TAKING UP A HUGE MAGNIFYING GLASS."

ished counting slowly. "Look here! This is only five hundred dollars."

"That is what I said," protested Juanita.

Clavering pushed the money towards Savelli scornfully. "No! I wouldn't waste my time for five hundred dollars."

"But that was our agreement," persisted the woman.

The novelist shook his head obdurately. "Why, I wouldn't get mixed up in this for less than a thousand dollars at least, my dear lady."

"Oh, but we couldn't afford to pay that. We are poor," whined Weinberg.

Clavering took up his manuscript as if he had no further interest in their project. "Be careful of the stairs when you go out. It's dark in the hall," he cautioned as if he had spoken the final word.

With muttered imprecations the trio paused for consultation. Clavering listened intently. Were they really going? Had he played the game too far? He glanced at his watch. In three minutes Flynn ought

to give his signal. The novelist held his breath in suspense; then as he saw the three turn back again, he bent more busily than ever over his manuscript. "Ah, ha!" he chuckled to himself. "The flies haven't wriggled out of the web yet."

"We will give you six hundred dollars," Juanita announced, as she came back to his desk. "That is all we can do; the relatives are poor."

Only two minutes more, Clavering was calculating.

"Well, when you get rich, come back and I'll talk with you," he replied, without raising his eyes from the pages before him.

Another mumbled conference followed; then Juanita threw another pile of bills on the table. "We will give you what you want, then," she said curtly.

"So! Not so poor as you were a while ago," said Clavering, gathering up the money. He rose and glanced at the clock. The time had nearly reached the crucial moment. "Well, all right! Now I must

change my coat." He moved off and had almost reached his bedroom door when "Snap, Snap," something rattled against the window pane. An exultant smile beamed upon his crafty face as he turned.

"What's that?" cried Savelli, starting up.

"It's those street ruffians blowing beans at my window. I'll get my cane and give them a good thrashing," Clavering raged.

The Italian gripped his arm. "Why did you send for us to come here?" he demanded savagely.

"Why, I thought you wanted to capture that stenographer," was the meek reply.

A sharp cry of warning from Weinberg brought Savelli to the door.

"Listen!" cried the terrified Jew.

There was a sound of hurrying feet in the hall below. Juanita rushed to the door too, and bent her ear.

"It's a trap!" she shrieked, rushing back to her companion. With an oath Savelli drew a knife and lunged at Clavering: "You—" his voice trailed off in an unmean-

ing rattle. The next moment they found themselves in utter darkness.

The novelist had reached the electric light switch and turned off the light. There was a rush of feet on the stairs, the darting flash of a dark lantern. Curses and blows and cries sounded.

"Here's one of them!"

"I've got him!"

"Drop that knife! Drop it!"

A scream, the snapping of handcuffs, then the voice of Flynn shouting to his men to put on the lights, followed.

"The switch! Right hand, by the door!" yelled Clavering.

Click! Flash! The lights were on.

"Ha! Ha!" jeered Clavering. "A good joke, eh?"

In the moment of darkness he had mounted the library ladder like an agile cat, and now, in the blinding rekindling of the light, stood revealed on the very top of the bookcases, near the hall door, grinning down

with almost boyish glee at his dramatic capture.

There came another sound of feet upon the stairs, whereupon Jack Howell and a good-looking young man whom there was no difficulty in identifying as Victor Holt burst in, dragging between them still another terrified captive.

"Well, this is immense!" shouted the reporter, as he looked about the room. "We've got all four of them! Here's the man who did the trick, Mr. Holt." He grasped the hand of the elated Clavering and presented the lawyer and the novelist to each other.

But the latter had no time for congratulations.

"Get them out of here!" he commanded, waving his hands impatiently at the detectives. "Get them out of here! I've got to get to work again. Hah!" he ejaculated, as the gangsters were led away. "Got an idea for another chapter! 'The Round

Up.' ” And he began to scribble hastily at his desk. The capture of four members of the Scarlet Band was lost as an everyday occurrence in the resurgence of his ruling passion.

“But Margaret, my sister, where is she?” demanded Holt, laying his hand on the old man’s shoulder.

“Oh, that’s so!” said Clavering, who had been oblivious of Margaret too in the flood of inspiration that swept over him. “I’ll call her!”

Margaret came quickly at his summons, and paused at the door a moment, then with a wild cry of joy rushed straight to her brother’s arms.

“Victor! Victor!” she sobbed as he clasped her close. “I have you back! You are safe! Oh, my dear, is it true? Is it true?”

For a moment Victor Holt could not speak. Then he bent his head close to the dark one of his sister lying on his breast. “There, there, dear, it’s all right! It’s all

right, Honey! We are together again. There, dear! There."

Howell, choked by a strangling feeling in his throat, slipped out of the room. The criminologist blew his nose and blinked, with an unaccustomed moisture in his eyes. . . .

The following day, true to Howell's prediction, the papers were full of Clavering's achievement. It was with a supreme grin of satisfaction that the novelist read the head-lines: "WINTHROP CLAVERING THE AUTHOR RESCUES VICTOR HOLT AND CORRALS NEW YORK'S MOST NOTORIOUS GANGSTERS."

"Huh!" he grunted. "And they would call me 'Old Grape Nuts' eh? I suppose that reporter has given himself some credit too." However, though he read every word of the stirring account, he could find no mention of John Howell. Everything was Clavering—Clavering—Clavering.

There was a great rounding up by Holt and his men during the next few days, for

Howell had communicated to them the results of his visit to Dixon, the radiographer. Dixon had succeeded wonderfully in photographing the contents of the package that Margaret had secured at the Beaumont, and by means of the purloined and X-rayed list nearly all the members of the Scarlet Band were run to earth and captured. The public drew a long sigh of relief and sat back to await the next in order of the city's nine days' wonders. But it was indeed a long time before complete oblivion overtook the doings of the Scarlet Band.

CHAPTER XIX

THE END OF THE STORY

SPRING had come again, and the wooded hills about Chester, up in Maine, were green with vigorous, new foliage. The brook that wound down the hillside babbled its welcome to the vernal change, and leaped forward along its rocky bed in copious floods. Now stopping to take breath in some shady pool, pushing on again over mossy rocks, in whirling, Dervish-like eddies, it joined with the birds to make Spring audible.

Margaret Holt watched the sparkling water. It seemed to be singing to her, answering the troubled questions in her heart; "Spring! Spring!" it sang. "It is the time to be joyous! The past is dead! Beyond there are tranquil waters. Come! Come!"

And Victor Holt too paused a moment, as he came up the bank winding his reel, to

watch his sister. What a picture she made, he thought, as she sat there, leaning her chin upon her hand. Her grey eyes, black now with the intensity of her thought, gazed sweetly into space; the soft breeze blew gently on the tendrils of her lustrous hair; her cheeks were flushed with pink; her whole figure glowed with spirit and perfect health.

"What are you thinking of, Sis?" he asked, as he dropped to the ground beside her.

"Oh, nothing," she answered, startled. Involuntarily she crushed a letter in her hand, and hid it in the grass beside her.

"You've had a letter from Jack Howell lately, haven't you?" he asked casually, as he lighted his pipe.

"Yes," she answered, with a sigh, "and I don't know what to say to it."

"Well?" Victor blew the smoke from his mouth in curling rings. "What do you want to say?"

The girl was silent for a moment, then with a sudden impulse gave the letter to her

brother. "Read it, Vic, and tell me," she said.

He took the crumpled thing and opened it out. The words were badly blotted—by tears, he guessed. He read:

"You say the past has made you an outcast from the world. Well, that's not so. And yet, until you feel differently, let's have a new world of our own. It will be a little one, but I don't mind being exclusive. There can never be anyone else in the big world for me, so why condemn me to a life of miserable loneliness? Come and live in my heart and let that be your world. You say you can't get away from yourself. Why, yes you can, for in this heart of mine no one can follow you. I realise all you say about the work to which you have consecrated yourself; but haven't you now done your share? Why not take up a new mission in life, and devote yourself to making one miserable man happy? Think it over, little girl. Don't write me again that nothing can change your decision, because you are only fooling yourself. I can change it, and I am going to do it, too, if we wait to celebrate our honeymoon in the Old Couples' Home. But tell me now that we need not wait. Say yes!

"Write me care of my club, for I may be out of town a week or two."

Victor smiled as he handed back the letter. "Good old Jack," he said. "He's a wonder. Pure gold." A great wave of gratitude made his voice husky. "If it hadn't been for him, little girl," he said, "neither of us would have been here to-day." He watched Margaret for a moment, then said abruptly, "Don't you love him, Sis?"

He could see her lovely colour mounting from throat to brow, but she only shook her head. The grey eyes met his bravely. "It would not be right," she answered.

"Now look here, Margaret," said Victor. "You must not go on brooding over the past. Jack knows, and he loves you, and wants you. There's your answer to that. If you're wavering between duty and happiness, I can settle that for you now. Never so long as I live shall you go back to the work you've been doing. You've done your part and enough. My God, what a part it has been!" His voice shook, as he hurried

on. "It is work for men now. You have asked my advice, and here it is. If Jack Howell means happiness to you, take him. You have every right."

Margaret sat where he left her, and watched him disappear through the trees. With a sigh, she reached for the letter that lay on the ground beside her. Her hand brushed a little bunch of forget-me-nots that she had thrust into her belt as she came through the garden. She took them up and held them close, and the quaint words of Howell's in *The Refuge* came to her: "A souvenir of our meeting, a nice little bunch of forget-me-nots," he had said about his wounded fingers. She had a sudden vision of the bruised and bleeding hand, and with a little cry of love and longing, she pressed the blue flowers passionately to her lips.

"'Out of town a week or two,' the letter said. Why," she mused, aloud, "I wonder where he is?"

"Well, he's in the country just now,

getting close to Paradise," said a familiar voice among the trees behind her. She sprang startled to her feet and turned.

Jack Howell himself was standing there, looking at her with grave, intent eyes.

For an instant his glance travelled to his letter, which had fluttered to the ground, then back to her face again. He smiled: "Well?" and again he said, as he had said once long before, "Well?—"

.

Victor Holt sat swinging his legs from the bars of the pasture fence as Howell, with his arm about Margaret, came slowly down the wooded road. "Thank God!" he murmured fervently as he saw them together, and perceived the radiance in his sister's face.

"And after all," said Jack, seizing Victor's extended hand, "old Clavering has struck it right again."

"Clavering? How's that?" said Victor.

"Listen to this," Jack said, and gaily waved a clipping that he extracted from his

pocket. "I culled this from the final chapter of the great story," he explained.

Victor laughed as Jack began to read aloud dramatically:

"'As the now beaten and baffled Scarlet Banders were led away, shackled to the detectives, a half sob of triumph broke from our heroine's lips. Then the light of love flamed into her beautiful grey eyes and she turned towards the young reporter waiting with outstretched arms to receive her. At last she had found her real refuge. With a sob of ecstatic joy, the words came from her lips . . .'"

"Margaret," cried Victor.

"The words, 'I love you,'" quoted Margaret, prettily, in conclusion. "Yes, Victor, it's true."

THE END

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